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Apocalypse Again: Secular and Religious Uses of the Apocalyptic Framework

by

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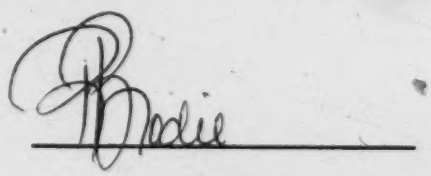

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S Kent

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June 23/99

Dedicated to my parents,
Blair, Roxanne, Michelle, Sean, Mackenzie,
Ayla, and Jason - each of you
has taught me the wisdom
in loving today
as I look to tomorrow.

And to all those
who nodded and smiled politely
after asking me what I was working on,
I thank you
for at least feigning interest.

Abstract

This thesis is a study of a paradigm that emerges in realistic apocalyptic forms such as literature, social organization, and individual ideologies. Accordingly, I analyze the Book of Revelation, David Koresh and the Branch Davidians, *The Turner Diaries*, and Timothy McVeigh. Under pressure, these groups respond to their environment through an apocalyptic worldview, often resulting in catastrophic outcomes. This thesis concludes that any analysis of contemporary apocalyptic movements should take into account both secular and religious usages of the apocalyptic framework.

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Having thought that I would never complete this thesis before an apocalypse actually arrives, I owe thanks to the many people who have helped me along the way. To Stephen Kent and Francis Landy, thank you both for taking me beyond what I thought were my own limits, challenging me subtly (and occasionally not so subtly) in our talks to look a little closer, explore a little deeper, and revise a little longer. In the end (pardon the pun), the advice given helped me produce not only a better analysis, but also it showed me an important characteristic in making a great teacher - patience. Thank you both for the patience you showed me in the time it took for me to finally get it right.

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Introduction

Foundational to understanding the nuances of apocalyptic belief is identifying the interaction between social, political, and religious factors during periods of extreme crisis. While each of these elements separately influences the various ways in which some groups utilize the apocalyptic framework, the likelihood of a violent response to a pressure-filled situation increases. Even the perception of a crisis existing in one (or all) of the social, political, or religious areas often is enough to instigate a dynamic response. Because of this potential volatility in the use of the apocalyptic framework, the connection between external pressures and internal (or group) reactions requires attention.

To fully examine how these factors play out in the contemporary period, we must begin by examining the origins of the apocalyptic concept, which developed as a specific response to a certain social, political, and religious environment. An historical examination provides vital clues for understanding later religiously inclined groups, because they continue to utilize the familiar apocalyptic framework that arose in Jewish and early Christian eschatology in order to explain their own social crises. If one looks, for example, at the Branch Davidians, William Pierce's

right-wing militia-inspiring novel, *The Turner Diaries*, and Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, we will see clear connections appear between the historic apocalyptic framework presented in the Book of Revelation (written 1900 years ago) and these groups' current ideologies and beliefs.

This thesis, therefore, begins the analysis of contemporary group and individual usage of the apocalyptic framework by examining how the early Christians used the Jewish model of millenarianism to create their own worldview regarding the returning Christ, as depicted in the Book of Revelation. The new worldview developed in Revelation emerged from the combination of Jewish millenarian beliefs and John the Apostle's specific interpretations of his political, social, and religious circumstances. By layering the concerns of John's time on the pre-existing apocalyptic model while leaving the complex images and meaning open to subsequent interpretations by other groups and individuals, the Book of Revelation remains a complex and poignant text.

The most successful techniques in deciphering the meaning and structure of the Book of Revelation are literary critical and historical critical methodologies that involve both the context from which Revelation emerged and the reader's particular interaction with a text. These two approaches prove particularly effective when examining the

use of the apocalyptic framework by the Branch Davidians in Chapter Two. That chapter focuses on how the Branch Davidians applied the text of Revelation to their own situation with the BATF and FBI during the fifty-one day siege at Waco that began on February 28 and ended on April 19, 1993. This crisis situation put extreme pressure on the close-knit community with disastrous and fiery results.

Many parallels exist between the BATF/FBI conflict with the Branch Davidians and the conflict between Christians and their Roman persecutors. To establish the similarities and see how influential Revelation's perceived message was on the Branch Davidians, the use of two different perspectives is crucial. First, the use of a textual approach illustrates how the group interprets particular passages in the Book of Revelation that deal with the End Time, the returning messiah, and sexuality. Linked with a sociological perspective, the textual analysis provides a base from which one can examine how the differing pressures of the time affected group cohesiveness, the group's response to outside influences, and how the outside world saw them.

Chapter three moves away from a specific group influenced by apocalyptic patterns to a piece of literature that depicts them. *The Turner Diaries* is a racist, right

wing novel that describes an apocalypse of sorts, although there is little direct evidence connecting the novel with the theological motivations of the early Christians. The author, however, still patterns the novel's fictional events on the established apocalyptic framework, despite its secular nature. While the eschatological connections between the Book of Revelation and *The Turner Diaries* are not readily apparent, they become clear once the textual analysis illustrates the similarity in apocalyptic visions between the Kingdom of God and the New Era. Further connections appear when one sees how the Organization (the fictional group of elite Aryans in the novel) deals with the perceived governmental oppression of the Chosen people. When the textual approach combines with the sociological one, the author's own visions of an ideal world clearly parallel Revelation's Kingdom of God, with the addition of a racist aspect that replaces the religious dynamic of the latter.

The final chapter deals exclusively with Timothy McVeigh, the convicted Oklahoma City bomber. The methodology most helpful in understanding his actions is sociological, primarily because McVeigh responded directly to the stresses of his chosen environment, basing his actions on an unique worldview. A sociological

interpretation, combined with the apocalyptic framework, explores the pressures he believed existed in his surroundings and provides possible explanations for his violent reactions in dealing with the perceived threats.

Influenced by *The Turner Diaries*, the Branch Davidian conflict, and right-wing militia propaganda, McVeigh's actions demonstrate how easy it is to cross the boundaries separating fiction and reality. In McVeigh's case, the catalyst for action was seeing the governmental siege at Waco, and superimposing his desire for vengeance onto an unsuspecting populace.

McVeigh's use of the patterns of apocalyptic beliefs, which recur under different circumstances and in different eras, alerts us to the need to explore the connections in apocalyptic interpretations. Since there is little research developing the link between the Book of Revelation, the Branch Davidians, *The Turner Diaries*, and Timothy McVeigh, this examination may provide a glimpse into an area needing further exploration. The primary focus of my thesis is to establish how an apocalyptic pattern recurs despite the passage of time. Said differently, the thesis examines how the influences of past events translate into new applications of apocalyptic belief-patterns by both secular and religiously based groups.

Chapter One: The Book of Revelation

> And I *saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest did not come to life until the thousand years were completed ...And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations...to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore (Rev 20:4-8).

Echoing for millennia, this passage has influenced the beliefs of Christian believers, revolutionaries, and millenarians with varying consequences and results. Although these words and the rest of the Book of Revelation still garner the attention of both faithful and scholars alike, the Book's complexity deserves further analysis from a literary critical perspective and an historical critical approach. For example, the literary critical method provides a detailed way of looking at images and symbols presented in the text and discovering the possible impact they have on the reader. This literary impact contributes to the power of the Book of Revelation by expanding upon the contextual elements with which the historical critical method furnishes the reader.

By including historical information on the Book of Revelation, the origins of the apocalyptic genre emerge, thereby creating a base model from which to compare

contemporary uses of the genre. From learning about the circumstances surrounding the rise of the apocalyptic framework and its distinct function at the time of its creation, it is possible to understand what influences and motivates contemporary groups, authors, and individuals. The combination of these two approaches or methodologies provides insight into the Book's context, framework, meaning, and purpose. Moreover, through these methodologies we see how contemporary readers embrace the message of the Book, often unwittingly applying the apocalyptic paradigm to their own situation.

As part of the literary exploration of the imaginative apocalyptic imagery found in the Book of Revelation, the analysis also delves into the meaning of key symbols in the text. The depiction and descriptions of the Antichrist, the Red Dragon, and the White Horse are images that have become archetypal in the last two millennia. Consequentially, many contemporary groups and individuals allude to the archetypal and more general understanding of the symbol rather than to the symbol's particular use in the original apocalyptic texts. The mystifying nature of the symbols allows for both the general and specific understanding, but it also allows for the potential of conflicting interpretations.

Because of their multiple potential interpretations, the symbols in the Book of Revelation have become the subject of polemic. Perhaps, though, the first step in understanding the polemics involves appreciating the context out of which the Book originated, the people to whom it spoke when it first emerged, and the religious attitudes and circumstances the author exhorted his readers to embody and accept.

The Rise of the Christian Apocalyptic Tradition

In both an historical and theological sense, the Jewish Apocalypse is the first stage of and forerunner to the Christian apocalyptic tradition. The development and transition between the Jewish and Christian traditions is an extensively researched topic, but the one work that dominates this analysis is Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. This work is significant because it was the first major work that dealt with the revolutionary millenarian tradition in Western Europe stemming from early Jewish apocalyptic beliefs. The text also includes a focus on the apocalyptic movements being reactive to the societal pressures of the time. Cohn claims that the rise of the apocalyptic genre directly resulted from early Jewish society's need to release and redirect political, social, and religious tensions.

While seemingly a valid analysis in both an historical and sociological sense, Cohn's theory garners some criticism, especially from Bernard McGinn, an historical theologian. He consistently argues that the revolutionary apocalyptic paradigm that Cohn propounds is the exception and not the rule for apocalyptic movements.[1] McGinn claims that, usually, apocalyptic movements are conservative, as much "designed to maintain the political, social, and economic order as to overthrow it" (McGinn, 1998:30). However, these two, apparently competing, perspectives actually may share a similar presupposition.

The similar presupposition that they share is that apocalyptic movements are a group's response to its environment. Some groups attempt to change their environment through revolutionary action in an attempt to achieve their utopic[2] ideals, while others react through

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[1] Choosing Cohn and McGinn as contrasts is important because they are forerunners in the field of apocalyptic history. *The Pursuit of the Millennium* gained considerable attention when it was originally published, and was so popular that Cohn revised it decades later. As a referential text, *Pursuit* was perhaps the single most influential study written. McGinn, by contrast, wanting to refute many of the points that Cohn brought forth, wrote several texts on the history of apocalypticism from a different vantage point. It is natural, then, to place Cohn and McGinn as competitors in the social, political, and religious history of the time during which Revelation emerged, thereby illustrating the complexity of the issues.

[2] For the purpose of this examination, the utopic state is the final state where the religious, social, and political environment coincides with a group's particular

non-violent means when trying to maintain their utopic ideals in the face of potential change. The existence of both types of apocalyptic groups illustrates the complexity of the group dynamics, but in this examination the examples are revolutionary rather than conservatively oriented. For this reason, Cohn's understanding of many apocalyptic movements as revolutionary and linked with their environment provides greater focus and insight into the Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic history. Cohn argues that apocalyptic groups needed an outlet to channel the forces of change that they saw as imminent when faced with intense social, political, or religious pressures. The outlet often resulted in drastic change to their worldly environment so that it matched what the group perceived as God's righteous kingdom.

The centuries immediately prior to what we call the Common Era were among the most chaotic and crisis-filled centuries in Jewish history. The element that probably contributed the most to the crisis was the conflict between Jewish and Hellenistic cultures. The process of Hellenization began with Alexander's victories in the Ancient Near East in 334 to 331 B.C.E. and for close to three centuries, until Roman rule in 63 B.C.E. Although

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ideology.

initiated by Alexander, successive Hellenistic empires ruled Judea, namely the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires. Because these governing empires seemed universalizing and homogenizing to Jews, many in the lower social stratas (especially during the Seleucid empire) perceived the Hellenistic influence as a threat to the Jewish traditional religious practices and way of life (St. Clair, 1992:25).

Not all Jews, however, responded to the Hellenistic culture in a similar fashion. Like many other people under foreign rule, reactions to the governing power were diverse. During the Seleucid era, for instance, many of the elite Jews "eagerly adopted Greek manners and customs [whereas] the common people clung all the more resolutely to the faith of their fathers" (Cohn, 1970:21; cf. Bilde, 1994:21). Interestingly, there also existed a faction within the Jewish elite that resisted Hellenism, resulting in a fragmentation of Jewish society. It was not until "a deposed [Jewish] high priest tried to oust his successor, who was favored by [the Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV Epiphanes] and [who] had paid handsomely for that favor" (Cohn, 1993:166-167) that there was any kind of unified Jewish resistance against the foreign rulers' influence. The consequences of the Jews' resistance to Antiochus' unwelcome involvement in the selection of the high priest,

however, was severe. Antiochus prohibited "[a]ll the observances of the Jewish religion" (Cohn, 1993:167) which directly led to the Maccabean revolt in 168 B.C.E. by the priestly family of the Hasmonaeans.

The Maccabean revolt achieved "political independence for Judea... [once they] skillfully exploit[ed] the chaotic state of the Seleucid kingdom after the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes" (St. Clair, 1992:26). During this brief period of independence, the immediate threat to Jewish culture seemed to have diminished in the wake of victory, but the apocalyptic attitudes that had surfaced during the tumultuous fight to maintain Jewish identity remained in Jewish thought. The Book of Daniel depicts the fervent apocalyptic attitudes the Jews adopted in the face of the pressures endured during Antiochus IV's persecution, and the visions were indicative of the Jewish perception of an immediate crisis. Four dominating world empires:

> ...are portrayed as a lion, a leopard, a bear and a non-descript beast. These four empires can be identified as Babylonia, Media, Persia, and Greece....Daniel prophesies that God will set up his eternal kingdom in the days of the fourth empire (2:44).... In chapter 7, Daniel is permitted to see further into the future to the final judgment [that] comes when the 'one like a son of man' receives the kingdom from the 'Ancient of Days' (God the Father) and the Antichrist is destroyed (7:13) (Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, 1989:48-49).

The Seleucid occupation was a catalyst for writings that illustrated the intensity and fanaticism of the revolutionary eschatology paradigm,[3] which in turn helped sharpen the conflict between Hellenistic and non-Hellenistic cultures. It would not be long, however, before apocalyptic thought would again gain prominence because in 63 B.C.E., the Romans, under general Pompey, took Judea.

Although in the first century B.C.E. it was the general "Roman custom to tolerate various religions as long as they behaved themselves" (Grabbe, 1992:398), the Hasmoneans had "aroused such intense hatred and because there were growing messianic expectations among the Jews, the Romans had to... [govern Judea directly] by a prefect, later a procurator, who was subject to the authority of the Roman governor of Syria" (St. Clair, 1992:26-27). This situation sparked a

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[3] Revolutionary eschatology is the combination of theology and imagery that depicts the world as being:

> ...dominated by an evil, tyrannous power of boundless destructiveness--a power moreover which is imagined not as simply human but as demonic. The tyranny of that power will become more and more outrageous, the sufferings of its victims more and more intolerable - until suddenly the hour will strike when the Saints of God are able to rise up and overthrow it. Then the Saints themselves, the chosen, holy people who hitherto have groaned under the oppressor's heel, shall in their turn inherit dominion over the whole earth (Cohn, 1970:21).

This paradigm is important because it recurs throughout the Book of Revelation, *The Turner Diaries*, and in Branch Davidian theology and ideology.

series of failed revolts that were to have reestablished the Jewish monarchy and identity, but in 66 C.E., the revolts flared and ended with the Roman destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. The Jews' feelings concerning this period of crisis and rebellion (even as early as the second century B.C.E. [Grabbe, 1992:563]) were well documented by Jewish writers, who wrote about the Roman situation (and earlier the Ptolemaic) in the Sibylline Oracles. The Sibylline Oracles, with apocalyptic characteristics similar to the Book of Daniel, focused on the political prophecies of the Jewish future (Yarbro Collins, 1984:90) and foretold the downfall of the politically and morally corrupt ruling regime.

The fall of the Temple, however, challenged the religious life of the faithful to an even greater extent by the loss of both a focal point and a symbol of unity. The Jews, however, continued to maintain their culture and identity as the Chosen Ones even in the face of the Temple's destruction, by awaiting a messiah who would confirm their special status and be victorious against their enemies. From this Jewish social context emerged the Book of Revelation, a guide John wrote for his audience in a time of continuing conflict.

A theologically driven response to a secular, political threat is a prominent feature of Jewish apocalypticism, and is an important aspect that continues throughout apocalyptic thought. By embracing and extending the links among social, political, and religious conditions, writers took elements of Jewish apocalypticism and further created a genre that was not specifically of religious concern. The Book of Revelation is the most well known of these writings, but it certainly was not the only one (see Collins, 1984:2).

The fusing of religious, political, and social concerns created an entirely new form of eschatological writing, which focused on future unfoldings, and provided hope, warnings, and consolation in times of crisis. Although one could not change the reputedly revealed apocalyptic message (unlike prophetic warnings where the future remains open to action and thought), the believer could: "Be warned! And be encouraged! In spite of all opposition, He who loves us, and gave Himself for us, has already won the victory, and He will get us through!" (van Daalen, 1986:3). As Cohn indicates, this message of warning and encouragement is central to the Book of Revelation, and Christians blended this message well with Jewish apocalyptic notions of affirming their beliefs both for their own benefit, and for the outside world (Cohn, 1970:24). Cohn contends that the

Jews appealed to the supernatural power of God to fight on their behalf in opposition to the ruling Gentile nations.

Much like its Jewish counterpart, Christian apocalypticism was influenced and shaped by specific political, social, and religious circumstances. Amidst the rich Jewish apocalyptic tradition that was evident in the first century, the nascent Christian tradition was only a fringe societal element. Paradoxically, the Christian tradition grew as societal pressures increased. The Roman persecution of the Christians during Nero and Domitian's reign was a major source of external pressure exerted on the new sect, and the response to this constant threat of domination and eventual assimilation shines through apocalyptic writings.

Similar to the Jewish expectations of the messiah, early Christians awaited the messianic Kingdom of God, believing that His coming was imminent (St. Clair, 1992:51). Essentially, early Christians saw the period of the apocalypse as did their Jewish predecessors, when time was "divided into two eras, one preceding and the other following the triumphant advent of the messiah" (Cohn, 1970:23). As well, there was the "presupposition...that the world is fallen and evil, ...[that there was] the same type of esoteric (eschatological) community of the elect as in

Jewish Apocalypticism... [and there was] the same type of distinction between 'the children of light' and 'the children of darkness'" (Bilde, 1994:27).

Although the perceived Christian apocalypse was not necessarily catastrophic, the writings foretold that a transformation would occur soon. As a result, the early Christians thought "they were living in the last times" (McGinn, 1994:21). The belief in the righteous and imminent kingdom quickly found its way into canonized Christian apocalyptic literature. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark, for example, discussed the imminent kingdom to a lesser extent than the Book of Revelation, but echoed a similarly held belief in the Kingdom of God. These texts spoke of the supposedly imminent end of time, as well as the Kingdom's arrival:

> And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, it is he who shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached to the whole world for a witness to all nations, and then the end shall come.... Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away (Matthew 24:11-35).

This passage clearly states "Jesus' message about the End, ...[with its] underlying [conception of a] Jewish-Christian apocalypse" (McGinn, 1994:21), which gave the reader an understanding of what to anticipate when the supposed Kingdom arrived.

In the Book of Revelation, however, John presented fuller descriptions of the imminently unfolding Kingdom of God:

> Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near...BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and EVERY EYE WILL SEE HIM, EVEN THOSE WHO PIERCED HIM; AND ALL THE TRIBES OF THE EARTH WILL MOURN OVER HIM [author's emphasis] (Rev 1:3-7).

To spread his message, John wrote to the seven churches in letter form, similar to the letters of Paul, but with certain other peculiarities.

One such peculiarity is that, unlike Paul, John never expected to write another letter with the apocalyptic content. "It was not to be one apocalypse among others, but the only one, commissioned by Christ himself (Rev 1:11, 19; cf. 22:18-19)" (Krodel, 1989:51). John wrote the letter from Christ's perspective, but felt that it needed to be done only once. Furthermore, since he addressed the letter to the seven main churches, John thought that it would be read during the worship ceremonies along with other letters (Krodel, 1989:52; Beasley-Murray, 1974:13; Hemer, 1986:14), reaching a large portion of his intended audience. This was one of the advantages of the letter form: it was flexible enough to accommodate the apocalyptic visions and content, but could be included in worship so that the community could hear John's exhortations.

From this examination of both the theological and social history of the apocalyptic genre, the context from which the Book of Revelation emerged begins to take shape. The complete picture, however, requires further analysis of dating and authorship claims, as well as the meaning and purpose of the book. These elements demonstrate the themes of political, social, and religious stresses that the early Christians endured, as well as forming a basis to which many contemporary groups compare themselves. By paralleling contemporary situations and stresses with perceptions about the early Christians' situation, many contemporary groups find direction for their own actions.

Meaning and Purpose of the Book

A dichotomy exists when interpreting the Book of Revelation depending on whether one believes or disbelieves in the religiousness and truth of the text. The position the reader takes when approaching the text has an influence on his (or her) interaction with it. The reader's perspective, his understanding, and his expectations of the Book necessarily affect his interpretation, and the Book of Revelation (or more generally the apocalyptic genre) exemplifies this personalization of a text perfectly:

> Apocalyptic rhetoric (...a specific set of semantics that lacks any external referents and therefore lacks absolute 'meaning') utilizes metaphors and narratives whose emptiness creates a vacuum. The reader is [then] invited to fill this

> emptiness with material drawn from intertexts that in some way express her own heritage or experience (Thatcher, 1998:550).

Filling in Revelation's narrative with one's own interpretation, thereby shaping the text's meaning, is a major reason why the Book is so powerful. Its imaginative qualities hold such great attraction for most because Revelation lends itself to countless reinterpretations to suit the reader's particular worldview. In addition, the reinterpretation process applies to every era, group, and individual.

For example, the early Christians relied upon the strength of their belief in the Second Coming of Christ to place a barrier between themselves and the disbelieving outside world, just as Jews believed that their apocalyptic revelation separated them from their Hellenistic surroundings (Bilde, 1994:27). While uniting marginalized Christians into a distinct movement, a commonly shared worldview also contributed to the Christians' new interpretations of their existence within the world and of the righteousness of their religious tradition (Bilde, 1994:27).

Clearly, John[4] wrote the Book of Revelation to provide structure to a complex world and show how believers would be

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[4] Contentious arguments surround both authorship and dating claims for the Book of Revelation, but an exhaustive historical critical analysis of the Book is not the focus of this examination. For this reason, it suffices to follow

part of the coming Kingdom of God. While examining the *validity* of the reader's interpretation is beyond the scope of this study (and perhaps all of academia), how modern and ancient groups react to and use their understandings of the Book of Revelation is a key element in seeing the complexity of the text's influence on society.

While the details of the social, political, and religious circumstances necessarily differ between ancient and contemporary groups whose members read the Book of Revelation, many similarities exist in how each group approaches the text. The apocalyptic rhetoric remains open to the reader's particular interpretation, so Revelation's applicability to multiple people in multiple times continues.

The audience of John the Apostle, for instance, perceived the message contained in Revelation as a depiction of events on the verge of realization. So too did later

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the traditional authorship and dating theories that suggest that John the Apostle wrote the book during the reign of Domitian (circa 81-96). Although some claim that the Book emerged during Nero's reign written by an unknown prophet, the general theme of Revelation remains unchanged. The author was addressing the perceived feelings of persecution that Christians experienced under Imperial Rome during that era. By using symbolic images and names (i.e.. Babylon representing Rome), John was able to write of the final outcome between Christians and the Romans in Revelation without directly naming those he saw as responsible. For further discussion on the dating and authorship theories, see Beasley-Murray, 1974:32-37; Harrington, 1969:3-7; Kummel, 1992:466-472; Thompson, 1990:12-17; and Yarbro Collins, 1984:25-76.

groups who read Revelation. The images of the imminent fall of Rome contained direct implications for John's audience and the future state of the Christian world, when the predicted binding of Satan was to have brought the chiliasm to fruition. In this sense, the millennium supposedly told of changes for the Christians, who needed a rallying point to strengthen and unify them as a group. John, motivated by his revelatory visions, managed to target other Christians by providing a focus and common worldview. The pattern of applying Revelation's message to a contemporary situation (whatever the actual chronological date is) repeats itself numerous times. Examples of this pattern include the Taborites' long struggle to bring about the elimination of evil before the expected Second Coming in 1420, the Anabaptists' tragic announcement of the New Jerusalem's imminent advent at Munster in 1535, and more recently, the disaster that awaited the Branch Davidians.

John's audience, however, reacted quickly to the apocalyptic message of Revelation, rallying themselves against the Roman Empire and the notion of the divinity of emperors. In accordance with this belief, Christians waited expectantly for the parousia of Christ as the final event that would end their persecution. The contemporary message of Revelation was twofold: first, if one remained faithful

to the prescribed doctrines and beliefs of the Christian religion even during times of extreme persecution, then the blessed martyrs would gain victory and would be celebrated in heaven everlastingly (Harrington, 1969:24); and second, the meaning that early Christians derived from Revelation was that when the apocalypse occurred, Christ's appearance would eliminate the blasphemous reign of an improper ruler. Christ alone rules God's people, Christians believed, and His appearance would vindicate this belief.

On a contextual level, the purpose and meaning of the text were linked closely with the circumstances under which John wrote Revelation. Much of the Book responded to the persecution that the Christians felt during the reign of Domitian, and the mere belief in persecution proved to be enough of a catalyst to instigate their revolutionary apocalyptic response.

If persecution seemed inevitable, then the imminence of the millennium (the most prominent theme that runs through the Book) was surely an influential element in guiding the revolutionary response. Numerous commentaries discuss the true nature of John's millennium, but Krodel defines it perhaps the most succinctly:

> ...for [John,] the millennium is, first, the devil's millennium, between the temporary residence beneath the deep blue sea (the abyss, cf. 11:7; 13:1) and his permanent abode in the frying pan (the lake of fire). Second, with

> respect to the saints, it constitutes their reward and precedence over against 'the rest of the dead' (20:5). Third, it is the beginning of their eternal reign with Christ. In short, the millennial reign depicts in the form of a vision what is stated in the [Christian] tradition: 'the dead in Christ will rise first' (1 Thess. 4:16 [Krodel, 1989:70]).

The millennium, therefore, was a theological concept of far greater complexity and importance than simply being the reaction to and result of the pressures of Hellenism that the Christian people were subjected to--it was also an important unifying doctrine. When the End Time arrived and the messiah returned to eliminate Satan, all social, political and religious oppression would supposedly vanish in His glory, gathering all the believers together in the oneness of God. The gathering of the believers to await God's arrival became a central tenet in the Christian theological world.

Revelation was the epitome of this unifying belief system and followed the Jewish apocalyptic tradition of focusing on "the time of the end" (Krodel, 1989:43) while bringing together the terrestrial concerns of the day. For instance, Revelation celebrated martyrdom as an emulation of the messiah's virtue. Standing against the evils of Babylon (Rome)--the incarnation of Satan--and martyring oneself was a worthy sacrifice to gain the reward of eternal life.

Running throughout Revelation is John's ability to interweave the concerns of his day with theological issues designed to unite Christians. This interweaving and complexity of message appeals to various sections of the populace, further contributing to the feeling of Revelation's applicability to any reader. Using the end time framework of the Jewish apocalypses (i.e. Daniel or Ezra), John wrote Revelation as a layered text capable of reaching his audience at various levels. First, it is a text describing the messianic return that forewarns its readers of the impending millennium. Second, Revelation's message of unity is a rallying point for an apparently persecuted people which needed a focus to survive a threat. The final level is that the book is a continuation of the apocalyptic tradition known to the Jews, thereby having the potential to reach a great number of people. The intermingling of these diverse facets in Revelation results in a text that calls Christians (and Gentiles willing to listen to the message of Christ) to remain faithful to Christ, warning them not to become apostates. The message contained in the Book is as powerful as it is compelling to its readers, and served a variety of purposes in John's time.

Contemporary Understandings of Revelation's Meaning

For contemporary readers of the Book of Revelation, interpretations must necessarily differ because the context in which they read the Book has changed. Christ's parousia has not occurred, the Romans no longer reign over the Christians, and most people in the Christian world refer to the millennium as the year 2000 (or 2001 if one counts accurately) rather than the time of Christ's reappearance[5]. This nonconfirmation of millennial expectations forces Christians (and all others who read the Book of Revelation) to reevaluate how they interpret the text, because the predicted End Time did not occur as foretold. Despite reevaluating Revelation's message, many groups and individuals maintain the belief that the End Time still looms in their and the rest of humanity's future. John warned Christians about the supposed End Time in the Book of

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[5] This is the premillennialist theory, defined by Krodel as:

> ...the belief that after a brief reign of Antichrist, which generally is thought to last seven years, Christ will return and with his armies of raptured saints defeat the Antichrist in the battle of Armageddon. Then the millennium, the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, begins. After this interim of a thousand years comes the final judgment and the new creation (Krodel, 1989:26).

Postmillenialism, by contrast, "envisions the return of Christ transpiring after the millennial kingdom has been ushered in largely by human agency in terms of the gradual Christianization of culture" (Robbins and Palmer, 1997:9).

Revelation, so for many people, it is not a matter of *if* the apocalypse comes, but *when*.

Many contemporary Christians interpret the Book of Revelation analogically--"[w]hat Revelation said THEN also speaks to us NOW" (Montague, 1992:24 [author's emphasis]). By interpreting the Book in this fashion, readers "respect...the historical-critical method...[by] fully us[ing] its resources [but acknowledge that] [w]hat John intended to say thus exercises a control upon our possible interpretations....The original meaning eliminates certain options" (Montague, 1992:24). From this perspective then, the analogies drawn forge parallels between early and contemporary Christians, uniting them in new, and previously unimagined ways.

One example of an analogy drawn between events of the first century with events of the twentieth century is the overall reaction to persecution (allegedly) felt by certain sectarian groups. While, for example, the Christians of John's time rallied against the Roman Empire's program of persecution, the Branch Davidians rallied against federal government agencies who were supposedly persecuting them. David Koresh (1959-1993), who was leader of the Branch Davidians, read the Book of Revelation and believed that the situation of the early Christians was analogous to that of

his group of Christians. He believed that Revelation spoke directly to his situation, and only he was meant to decode the Book. Despite the 1900 years that separated the Christians under Roman rule and the Christians of today, John's words carry the same poignancy for the Branch Davidians as they did centuries ago, seemingly applying to whichever group read the text last.

A further example of analogous readings of the Book of Revelation is the continued expectation that Christ's parousia will initiate the millennium. Numerous religious groups[6] have Christ's reappearance as a relatively central doctrine in their theological worldview.[7] It makes little difference that, according to John, He should have appeared over 1900 years ago, since these groups believe that Revelation applies to them now: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near" (Rev 1:2). Many religious movements and individuals try to

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[6] Some notable religious groups include the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans, the Seventh Day Adventists, and the Millerites.

[7] Not all these religious groups follow the doctrine of premillennialism. Roman Catholics believe in amillennialism (which theorizes that the millennium is not a literal figure, but a symbolic one), as do Lutherans. The Seventh Day Adventists, Millerites and Mormons all belong to the premillennialist category.

quantify 'near' through various methods, and they insist that Christ's appearance is imminent.

The Apocalyptic Framework

Primarily as a result of Hellenizing pressures, Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature flourished, and gained popularity and significance with people in times of crisis. The apocalyptic framework used by Christian writers owes the majority of its conventions to the Jewish writers of the era, three centuries prior to the canonization of the Book of Revelation. The conceptual framework found in the Book, with its stylistic and contextual requirements, is foremost:

> ...a symbolic structure that can be given expression through different theological traditions and with varying emphases on the patterns of history or the cosmology of the heavenly regions. The apocalyptic revelation provides a comprehensive view of the world, which then provides the basis for exhortation or consolation. An apocalypse can provide support in the face of persecution...reassurance in the face of cultural shock ...[or] consolation for the dismal fate of humanity.... The constant factor is that the problem is put in perspective by the otherworldly revelation of a transcendent world and eschatological judgment (Collins, 1984:205).

The constant within the framework of apocalyptic writing "is structured according to a divinely-predetermined pattern of crisis, judgment, and vindication" (McGinn, 1995:60). A man becomes the means through which the divine speaks, and his pronouncements lay out humanity's future.

Along with this eschatological constant, however, further characteristics materialize. These characteristics contribute to the overall unity of the text by predicating certain conventions of the genre that guide readers' expectations that what they read deals with an apocalypse. Briefly outlined, these general elements are:

> 1. a fascination with symbols, with symbolic colors and numbers (seven, three, and twelve and their multiples);
> 2. the themes of heavenly battle and cosmic catastrophe;
> 3. the description of present political powers in terms of past ones (Rome as Babylon, the people of God as Jerusalem);
> 4. the life-and-death struggle of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world (Montague, 1992:17-18).

These features provide a structure from which categorization of various pieces of literature takes place, including the Book of Revelation.

Jewish apocalyptic prophecies, for instance, often vary considerably from this outline in terms of content[8] but maintain "the form of autobiographical reports about visions and auditions in which heavenly and/or end-time mysteries

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[8] Differences in content, for example, vary in the manner in which God reputedly reveals the knowledge (most often through an angel) of either the mysteries of heaven (Enoch 18:14-16) or the future of life on earth. Following the established pattern of prophetic revelation, an angel sent by God takes the seer on a "guided tour of heaven...[when the angel gives the seer a vision which is] then interpreted for the seer by the angel (Dan. 7:15-27 [Krodel, 1989:42-43]). Despite these differing methods, Jewish apocalypses maintain distinguishable characteristics, creating a genre of their own.

are disclosed.... By presenting [the] message in symbols and images that at times border on the bizarre, the author teases his audience to use their imagination" (Krodel, 1989:44-45), drawing readers into the importance of the confrontation between good and evil forces. The influence of the Jewish apocalyptic writings on the Book of Revelation appears in themes, form, and content. In this vein, the Book of Revelation is an heir to the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament that "directly or indirectly... [expresses] dissatisfaction with the status quo" (Krodel, 1989:43).

This dissatisfaction is clearly shown in Revelation, but with a different emphasis. Where the prophets:

> ...saw the future as being to a great extent the outcome of people's actions...the apocalyptic writers...laid far less stress on the human aspect. In their view, the real field of God's action lay away from the human scene. They believed that the decisive battle which was to ensure God's victory was not fought by human combatants but by supernatural powers (van Daalen, 1986:8).

The different emphasis influenced beliefs significantly, changing not only theologies, but also the manner in which people saw themselves in the great scheme of God's universe.

The Symbols[9]

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[9] Symbols are the only specific characteristic of the apocalyptic framework that I discuss in chapter one, as the other three characteristics form the structure around which chapter two (on the Branch Davidians), chapter three (on *The Turner Diaries)*, and chapter four (on Timothy McVeigh), centre. Where deviations from the basic outline exist, I

Symbolic images appear throughout the Book of Revelation. Most commonly, these images carry multiple meanings and blend together to form complex messages. Often, the repetition of images:

> ...gives a cumulative effect, as images used earlier are gathered together.... If we were to read Revelation aloud, we would notice structures, motifs, images, and perspectives forming and unforming sequentially and then appearing together...bring[ing] the work to a climax--not in the narrative line but in the concentration of images (Thompson, 1990:43-45).

Thompson elucidates this point with the example of the image of the "white horse, and He who sat upon it *is* called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war" (Rev 19:11, cf. 12-16). The building of the rider into a figure that recurs in separate units (although clearly linked in imagery) in 19:17-18 and 19:19-21 attributes increased significance and power to the image, connecting the rider of God's victory and judgment with the rider depicted in verse 6:2. There, the rider sat on the white horse and "had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer" (Rev 6:2).

Although the combination of the verses creates a narrative element that "unfolds a warring, conquering king, the first introducing and the second concluding the apocalyptic disasters described by the seer" (Thompson,

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include further discussion on the issue.

1990:44), the stately vision describes a double image. Initially, God gives the tools sufficient to wage the war against evil to the true warrior, who then becomes the warrior powerful enough to accomplish His destiny. The rider of the white horse prepares himself and his army for battle, and in Revelation 19:19-21, the confrontation comes to a head:

> And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence... And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse (Rev 19:19-21).

The combination of the horse and rider image, therefore, is significant because it ties the descriptive details into a unified whole. The reader adds to the image as he goes through the text creating a vision which is more dynamic and complex than would be possible if the portrayal were done in a single passage.

The Images of Satan, the Dragon, and the Serpent

Another important aspect in the building process of accumulated biblical images is the repetition of closely related, if not identical, images throughout the text (Thompson, 1990:43). The most prominent image that recurs is that of Satan. In Revelation, John often refers to Satan as the serpent, the Adversary, the monster, and the dragon interchangeably. On occasion, however, the name used

implies specific connotations and images. As well, John also melds the images of Satan with the Antichrist, further complicating the Satanic figure.

While a distinction exists between the figures of Satan and the Antichrist, John occasionally refers to the Antichrist, or the beast, as an instrument of chaos under the auspices of Satan. Essentially, the Antichrist is Satan's ally, emissary and his consort (Chamberlain, 1975:15). For instance, "[t]he images of the beast and dragon interchange and interact; but while the beast is an adversary on earth, the dragon is a 'portent...in heaven' (12:3), and involved in 'war...in heaven' (12:9)" (Laws, 1988:38). The different usage for the same image is the result of the surrounding nations' and religious groups' differences in their mythologies.

Laws describes the differences in mythology in this way:

> Many religions of the ancient Near East had as their creation myth a story of the battle between the creator god and a chaos monster.... Israel did not adopt this myth, though she may well have taken it over, as it were, 'demythologized', for both the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1:2 refer to a watery chaos before creation.... [This incorporation of the dragon, or chaos monster, therefore, into Revelation as the beast, brings with it] the connotations of that image [that] would be familiar to anyone within the Old Testament tradition; and the dragon of the Apocalypse has further direct links with that tradition; he is also 'that ancient serpent, the deceiver of the Fall myth of Gen. 3:1-5, and Satan

> the accuser and angelic adversary of Zech. 3:1, Job 1-2, [and] 1 Chron. 21:1 (Laws, 1988:38-40).

The influence of Near Eastern culture not only on the Hebrew Bible but also on New Testament writings, is clear from this perspective, and serves the function of connecting vast repertoires of symbols to the images depicted in Revelation. "What John has done is to identify the guardian of Rome not with any angel, but with the great cosmic adversary of the creator God" (Laws, 1988:41). John embraces the dichotomy of Good versus Evil in Revelation, and sharply comments on the division between the Christians and the Romans.

Having connected the beast and the dragon, further exploration into the images of evil follows (since it is imagery used repeatedly in contemporary times [i.e. by the Branch Davidians and in *The Turner Diaries*]). The Antichrist figures prominently in the worldviews of both the aforementioned examples, despite a slight shift away from the original meaning and purpose found in the Book of Revelation. Most obviously, many contemporary people fuse the two figures without distinguishing the difference in the roles of the Antichrist and Satan within the original Christian text. The Satan/Antichrist figure becomes representative of all evil, an archetypal image that becomes generalized and frequently used.

In Revelation, the Antichrist is commonly held to be the symbolic representation of the tyrannical Roman emperor Nero, with a specific numerological association connected with it--666. Although in contemporary times people associate this number with almost any evil-minded figure, with examples ranging from Aleister Crowley to the President of the United States, in biblical hermeneutics there exists a certain appropriateness in the linkage of 666 with both the Antichrist and the emperor Nero.

John chose 666 to encode a specific name within the text of Revelation with certain associations and assumptions that went along with the general image of an evil entity. It was a number that people would later recognize as "symbolizing the Anti-Christ, a paragon of evil who will serve Satan during the Final Days of the planet" (Watt, 1989:369). John likely envisioned the Antichrist, "the enemy of everything Christ stands for" (Frye, 1981:95) as a figure of power and influence; in John's time, Nero embodied everything evil and fitted the traditional image well. One method modern biblical commentators use to apply this symbolic number to an emperor is by "taking the Greek *Neron Kaisar*, transliterating it into Hebrew and adding [the numbers] up (it will not work in Greek)" (Laws, 1988:47). This results in a numerical match up of 666 with the Roman

emperor, Nero. Many speculate "...John wanted to indicate to his readers that it was the Emperor Nero he wanted to name as chief vizier to the Evil One, but thought it politic to disguise the name by expressing it as its corresponding number (the sum of its letter' numerical values)" (Watt, 1989:372).

In addition, specific numerological concerns bear upon the symbolism of 666. For instance, 666 is "the sum of 111, 222, 333, which given the Christian concern with the Trinity can easily be made to seem significant" (Watt, 1989:377). This, however, reads a meaning back into Revelation that did not yet exist because the concept of the Trinity was a later Christian development. Furthermore, this numerological stance is secondary to the arithmetic significance of the number; it is the "first in a series of three 'triangular' numbers, where the triangular number of *n* ...is equal to 1+2+3...+n (in other words, a triangular is a sort of a summative factorial)" (Watt, 1989:377). In numerology, the value of a specific number holds power in the universe, as everything links to the cosmological whole (Laws, 1988:47-51).[10]

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[10] Many of these arguments seem excessively complex and unrelated. It could simply be that 666 was a number that held significance to John at the time, for obscure reasons contemporary interpreters will never know.

The importance of such a revelation lies in the belief the Christians held toward this alleged means of encoding. Whether or not this means of encoding is still relevant in the contemporary world is unclear, but it does not diminish the association between the Antichrist, the number 666, and any tyrannical and evil figure in the contemporary period.

The image of the Antichrist gains further complexity when the Scriptures depict the hierarchical nature of the relationship the Antichrist has with both Satan and humanity:

> And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were *like those* of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. And *I saw* one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed *and followed* after the beast; and they worshipped the dragon, because he gave his authority to the beast (Rev 13:2-4).

While the beast is commonly understood to be the Antichrist, the dragon, as previously argued, is Satan. This is meaningful because it clearly demonstrates the dynamics of the relationship between Satan, the Antichrist, and the people, which many interpreters then found existing in the history of Rome.

The Antichrist derives his authority from Satan and uses this authority to divide the people while preparing for the final battle. Through this illusionary authority, the unfaithful follow Satan's second-in-command and bestow the

Antichrist with power over themselves. John claimed this hierarchical relationship existed between Satan, the Antichrist, and the emperor Nero. The belief at the time of the writing of Revelation was that Nero was the epitome of evil. Through superstitious rumor, a belief circulated among the Christians that Nero was Satan's henchman, which "was only strengthened by [Nero's] death under obscure circumstances (immured at his country villa with no alternative, he fell on his sword)" (Watt, 1989:371). Many continued to believe that "though dead, [Nero had] the power to come back from the grave" (Watt, 1989:371), which illustrates how the relationship between Satan and the common people would continue--by Nero acting as the intermediary between the general populace and Satan.

Furthermore, the beast parodied, symbolized, and analogously represented everything in opposition to Christ:

> The Christ is the Son of God sent by His Father as the Son of Man to redeem and sanctify men. The Antichrist is, in a metaphorical, spiritual sense, the son of Satan sent by his Prince of Darkness to destroy and corrupt men. Christ is the suffering Servant of the Lord, obedient unto death, observing the Law of God and raising it to the perfection of the New Law of Love. The Antichrist, on the other hand, surpasses all others in hostility to God; he is the leader of a final revolt against God.... Motivated by hatred of God and man...[he] takes his seat, as the abomination of desolation, proclaiming that he himself is God. Christ is the Lamb of God who saves and nurtures the elect. The Antichrist is the Beast of Satan...[who] makes plans and raises armies to persecute the faithful. Christ is the

> source of truth...[t]he Antichrist is the channel of falsity....Christ is the ever faithful Son of God. The Antichrist is the great apostate (Miceli, 1981:45-46; cf. Russell, 1988:68; Russell, 1984:103-104).

Within a theological framework, it is between these dual and opposing forces that humanity chooses its allegiance, knowing that the choice secures the individual's future with either the forces of Darkness or of Light.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the goal of providing an historical and literary connection between the Book of Revelation and contemporary times is in the application of these connections to current groups, novels, and events, specifically the Branch Davidians, *The Turner Diaries*, and Timothy McVeigh. Parallels exist between the framework used in the aforementioned examples and the framework that appears in the Book of Revelation, which creates an undeniable link between the ancient text and the contemporary world.

The following chapters, however, build upon the use of the Book of Revelation in group and individual worldviews. The changes in interpretation reflect a contemporary understanding of an ancient text, and these changes have unimaginably interesting meaning to the people who created them. This is the purpose behind the discussion of the Jewish apocalypse, the historical circumstances of the early

Christians, and the apocalyptic framework. These aspects of the Book of Revelation are useful background preparation for the analysis of contemporary apocalyptic occurrences, including the Branch Davidians, *The Turner Diaries*, and Timothy McVeigh. The main connection among these divergent instances,[11] however, is the belief that something better lies in the future, which depends on the power of a greater force. Whether this force ultimately is God, superior genetics, or the ability to instigate a revolutionary apocalypse, varies among individuals and groups.

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[11] Timothy McVeigh's actions, however, are not a direct reflection of the Book of Revelation, but rather are a secular acceptance of the apocalyptic framework used in *The Turner Diaries*. Furthermore, McVeigh reacts to the Branch Davidians' deaths, whose group also used the apocalyptic framework exemplified by the Book of Revelation. The connection between McVeigh and the other cases is the premise of Chapter Four.

Chapter Two: The Branch Davidians

EDEN TO EDEN

Search forth for the meaning here,
Hidden within these words
'Tis a song that's sung of fallen tears,
Given way for two love birds.

.....

For loneliness and solitaire,
Is death to every soul.
For birds of God were meant to pair,
The two to complete the whole.

And now we see the final meaning
Of this rhyme and verse:
The pending judgment of the King
Who rules the universe.

For with Adam and his Spirit Eve,
To share the kingdom fair;
But when they sinned they lost their crown
In exchange for shame to bear.

So Eve travailed and brought forth death,
And passed the crown to all;
For each to learn the lesson here,
The kingdom of the fall.

For virgins do not bring forth sons,
Until God does reverse,
The inner meaning of the law,
To remove man from the curse.

For in the Christ, we've seen a bride,
The Water mixed with blood,
The wife with cloven tongues of fire,
Of whom the Christ has loved.

And now He's back to sing His song,
The life of every spring,
And love birds gather, each one with mate,
For the marriage of the King.

-David Koresh

These are the haunting words that Koresh wrote on April 18, 1993, to introduce his final exposition on the Book of Revelation, the night before his death. One of his express goals before leaving Mt. Carmel (dubbed Ranch Apocalypse when Koresh seized power from George Roden in 1987), was to

unveil the secret message contained in the Seven Seals of the Book of Revelation. The time he had to work on his exegesis, however, ended with the events of the following morning. While this chapter deals with both a textual analysis of the Book of Revelation from the Branch Davidians' perspective, the analysis also introduces the sociological implications of the Branch Davidians' use of the apocalyptic imagery and message found within the Book. Together, these two methodologies illustrate the complex nature of both personal biblical interpretations, and the societal reactions that stem from people adhering to these beliefs.

The Seventh-Day Adventist Roots of the Branch Davidians

The Branch Davidians under Koresh's leadership can trace their origins back to the Millerites (founded by William Miller) of the early 1840s and the Seventh-Day Adventist movement co-founded by Ellen White in 1855. These groups made a strong impression on the Branch Davidians' tradition of apocalyptic thought and have consistently reinforced the belief that the return of Christ is a datable event in humanity's foreseeable (if not immediate) future. The Millerites and the Seventh-Day Adventists were strong millenarian sects that based most of their ideology upon the notion of Christ's imminent Second Coming, predicting his

return between March 3, 1843 and October 22, 1844 (Branch, 1993:8).

For White, October 22, 1844 did mark the beginning of Christ's approaching advent (which is also the "beginning of the millennium" [Spicer, 1944:353]), but it also marked the need for strict adherence to Adventist teachings. As fundamental elements of their theology, all members of the newly formed Seventh-Day Adventist church had to live what the group called righteous lives and believe in White's divinely inspired interpretation of the Bible. Since the Seventh-Day Adventists base their theological worldview in the Protestant tradition of *sola scriptura* and "give very special interpretations to the apocalyptic visions found in some books of the Bible, notably Revelation" (Bainbridge, 1997:89), White's understanding of the Bible was sacrosanct to her followers.

From the heritage of White's Seventh-Day Adventist movement, a dedicated follower (Victor Houteff) wanted to reform the Seventh-Day Adventist church. Claiming "the Seventh-Day Adventist doctrines and teachings were deficient" (Pitts, 1995:21), Houteff wrote the "Shepherd's Rod," which was his own interpretation of Scripture. He believed that he was the rightful successor to White's prophetic role as God's messenger and was the one divinely

chosen person who could reform the wayward denomination. The Seventh-Day Adventists refused his counsel, and in 1929 Houteff started the Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists (henceforth, the DSDA) as a splinter group from the larger Adventist movement. Under Houteff's leadership (1929-1955), the group prepared for the end time, believing that "the last stage of the world's history was at hand. It was [Houteff's] life work to unlock the biblical secrets and show how the end would come" (Pitts, 1995:25).

To the shock of the DSDA, Houteff died before Christ's return. In a state of confusion and anxiety, the DSDA found leadership under Houteff's wife, Florence. In the four years of her heading the DSDA, her one notable contribution was of setting the exact time of Christ's return. Florence Houteff "announced that on April 22, 1959, God would remove both Jews and Arabs from Palestine and give the Holy Land to the [DSDA]" (Bainbridge, 1997:112). This announcement gave rise to a small exodus of believers to Mount Carmel from across the country. Hundreds of families had sold their property and traveled to be with Florence Houteff when Christ returned, but were greatly disappointed when the failure of her prophecy became apparent.

As a result of this disappointment and the congregations' subsequent lack of support, the DSDA

splintered further into the Davidian Seventh-Day Adventist Association, the General Association of Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists, and the Branch Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists. Maintaining the Mount Carmel compound, Benjamin Roden, who was a "strong and compelling figure" (Pitts, 1995:32), emerged as the most visible leader of the three main splinter groups and continued to lead the Branch Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists in White and Victor Houteff's tradition. He too thought that the group should eventually move to Israel for the Second Coming, but he died before this prediction was fulfilled.

Ben Roden's death led to a power struggle within the Roden family for the right of succession, and in the end, Lois Roden (Ben's wife) won out over George Roden (their son). Lois led the Branch Davidians in impressive style, proclaiming that she now received the divine messages as her predecessors had. Trying to maintain power by choosing who would succeed her, the authoritarian Mrs. Roden groomed a young enthusiastic member (Vernon Howell) as her eventual replacement, rather than giving in to her son's desires. George's persistence, however, could not be ignored when "he successfully lobbied and campaigned for election [to the leadership of the Branch Davidians] using monopolized mailing lists" (Pitts, 1995:37). In ill health and unable

to counter her son's activities, Lois Roden died a year later under George's authority.

In a complicated series of legal maneuverings and challenges to George's spiritual leadership,[12] Vernon Howell became the new head of the Branch Davidians in 1988. Howell usurped George's position in the compound after engaging him in a gun fight that landed George in the county jail for six months, and secured for Howell the support of the members. From that point on, Howell was to remain the uncontested leader of the Branch Davidian movement (see Appendix A).

Koresh, the Apocalyptic Messiah, and the Book of Revelation

From Koresh's perspective, the mindset used for interpreting the Book of Revelation begins with a single premise: "'If the Bible is true, then I'm Christ'" (qtd. in Lane, 1996:61). He developed this belief in his divine nature:

> ...[b]y linking his personal biography to a historical spiritual lineage.... [To this end, he] legally chang[ed] his name from Vernon Howell to David Koresh in 1990. "Koresh" is the Hebrew for "Cyrus," the Persian king who defeated the

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[12] George Roden faced leadership opposition by Vernon Howell, who in 1987, led eight men in a gun battle with Roden with the express purpose of gaining control of Mount Carmel.

> The Howell group sought to discredit Roden by arguing (1) that they had been expelled at gunpoint when Roden took over the seventy-seven acres by force...and (2) that Roden had desecrated a grave by exhuming a corpse, which he proposed to resurrect...The Howell group was trying to secure a picture of it as evidence of corpse abuse to present to authorities (Pitts, 1995:37).

> Babylonians five hundred years before the birth of [Jesus] Christ. In biblical language Koresh is *a* (as opposed to *the*) messiah, one appointed to carry out a special mission for God. His first name, David, asserts a lineage directly to the biblical King David, from whom the new messiah will be descended. By taking this name, David Koresh was thereby professing himself to be the spiritual descendant of King David, a messianic figure carrying out a divinely commissioned errand (Bromley and Silver, 1995:57).

Interestingly, Koresh blended the images of a Gentile and Jew to create his historical legitimacy. Perhaps Koresh saw himself as a messiah who could represent all of God's elect, whether they were Gentiles or Jews, since he was to give all of humanity the message of Christ.

Whatever his particular reasons for choosing that name combination, he was certain that he was selected by God for a specific purpose. Unlike Melchizedek[13] and Jesus (the messiahs who went ahead of him) Koresh never stated that he was divine in nature. Koresh described himself as "'ha[ving had] both a very worldly father and mother' ...[and was] 'the sinful messiah' [who] could fulfill the biblical

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[13] In the Hebrew Bible, Melchizedek is a king and priest of great importance, whose order was appropriated by King David. This appropriation showed Melchizedek's superiority to other priests and orders (Metzger and Coogan, 1993:511). In the New Testament, he is portrayed as "[w]ithout father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually" (Hebrews, 7:3). Further supporting the theory that Melchizedek is divine is the evidence found in the Nag Hammadi text of Melchizedek (IX,1). There, Melchizedek is Jesus Christ, having been crucified and then raised from the dead (Pearson, 1988:439). Koresh builds upon the importance of this lineage, but does not claim to be of the same substance as Jesus Christ.

prophecies which [he] thought called for a Messiah with the full scope of human frailty" (qtd. in Kopel and Blackman, 1997:26). One of the prophecies that supported Koresh's position was Psalms 45:16. The message contained in this passage was that the returning Messiah would have children: "In place of Thy fathers will be Thy sons; Thou shall make them princes in all the earth." On the basis of this biblical evidence, Koresh believed that he was the Messiah whom God chose to bear children (since Jesus never had offspring) and announce the End Times.

To communicate his belief in being the reincarnated messiah to his followers and the rest of the world, Koresh wrote an exposition on the Seven Seals demonstrating that God sent him back to earth to herald the Second Coming. Applying the text to his own situation and worldview, Koresh felt that he alone was the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David ...pictured before the Throne as a wounded Lamb, [who] is declared worthy to open the sealed book" (Tabor, 1995:267). His exposition answered what he believed was a crucial question in Revelation: "Who is this Christ and what remains of the mystery of Him?" (Koresh, 1994:3).

The answer to the question was clear for Koresh, but to prove his claim to followers, converts, and critics, Koresh needed to produce evidence to further reinforce his claim as

Christ. With this need in mind, Koresh tried to present his ideas clearly and concisely, and said as much in the introduction to his exegesis: "In my work to unfold th[e] mystery [of Christ] to you I will not use great techniques of scholarly display not in-depth reasoning of philosophy, no sophisticated, congenial [sic] language shall be used, just simple talk and reason" (Koresh, 1994:3). To understand Koresh's worldview, his exposition on the Seven Seals is an invaluable text. The text illustrates Koresh's imagination and shows how he used the apocalyptic framework for his own purposes. It depicts the Branch Davidians' worldview and provides clues predicting the likely response Koresh (and the Branch Davidians) would have to the crisis experienced with the BATF and FBI.

Vernon Howell as David Koresh

Koresh was an intelligent, mechanically oriented, charismatic leader who had an aptitude for the memorization of Scripture, especially Scripture dealing with the End Time (Bromley and Silver, 1995:55-57). These qualities made him a captivating figure to listen to and an undeniably powerful force in the Davidian members' lives. To his followers, his ability to memorize and recite Scripture at will reinforced the illusion that he possessed an understanding of the Bible superior to and unlike anyone else's.[14] Once he assumed the

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[14] Koresh proselytized mostly to mainstream Seventh-Day

leadership role in the relatively closed Davidian community,[15] his knowledge of Scripture combined with his compelling sermons made it difficult to challenge his views on biblical matters, since many members believed that his knowledge was due to his divine mission.

Tabor thinks that Koresh's appeal was in his portrayal of being a sinful messiah accessible to the lay people. Speaking from the authoritative position of the self-declared returning messiah, Koresh felt that "every book of the Bible meets and ends in the book of Revelation" (Koresh, 1994:6). In Revelation 11:15, for instance, the "seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he will reign for ever and ever.'" Koresh believed that Revelation spoke

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Adventists, who felt that "all truth is contained in the Bible ...[and] who already believed that God could send prophets as in the days of old" (Kopel and Blackman, 1997:27). Koresh's potential converts possessed at least a basic knowledge of Scripture (including rote memorization of passages), which suggests that Koresh's charisma influenced the Davidians' perception that he demonstrated a superior biblical knowledge and ability to interpret the text.

[15] The Branch Davidians' community (whose name is interchangeable with the Davidian name throughout this chapter) had isolationist tendencies, but should not be considered an extreme example of such a group. For instance, some members had jobs outside of the compound, and traveled in and out of Mount Carmel. Most members considered the compound home, and the communal nature of their living arrangements constituted a 'relatively closed' community.

of the End Time that was going to occur during his lifetime,[16] and that he was the only one who would be able to unlock the secrets of the Book. Arguing that "Jesus Christ revealed the book in the first century, but it was not to be opened until our own time, ...[Koresh] believed that he was the seventh and final messenger[17] who would restore all things before the return of Christ," (Tabor, 1995:269) as distinct from himself.[18] When Koresh interpreted the Seven Seals, therefore, he believed that he was not doing so from the perspective of an ordinary man, because he was a man with the power of Christ--the chosen

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[16] Many apocalyptic communities believe that any divinely inspired utterances apply specifically to their own situation and time, although written down in the past. Koresh, believing himself to be God's messenger, thought that the prophetic statements that John wrote did not apply to the first century, but to his situation and time. If they did apply to John's time, then Jesus would have brought about the Second Coming. This did not occur, so in Koresh's theology, he was born to fulfill those specific prophecies in his lifetime.

[17] The Davidians believed there were six previous messengers sent to earth by God:

> The first six angels [prophets/ messengers] had been William Miller (preaching the messages of the first and second angels), Ellen G, White (Third Angel), Victor Houteff (Fourth Angel), Ben Roden (Fifth Angel), and Lois Roden (who had long proclaimed herself the Sixth Angel).... Howell was the 'Seventh Angel' of the Book of Revelation (Kopel and Blackman, 1997:23).

[18] Koresh did not claim to be the son of God, Jesus, but a Christ that has a special purpose--to announce the End Times.

messenger who alone announces the coming apocalypse in his lifetime.[19]

To understand how Koresh was to accomplish this apocalyptic mission, one must look at how he foresaw his own role. His understanding of this role stemmed from his unique interpretation of the seals, which was the cornerstone of his theological worldview. Humanity was already in the age of the fifth seal (the four previous ones already having been manifested) and it was a crucial time for his emergence as the Christ. "The first Four Seals had been opened not only in teaching but in life, [his] doctrine held" (Reavis, 1995:106). Because humanity already found itself in the age of the Fifth Seal (considered an advanced stage in the apocalyptic chronology) the Lamb necessarily would return to open and decode the remaining seals, revealing the full complexity of the prophetic scriptures and preparing the elect for the final battle.

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[19] An interesting duality exists in Koresh's perception of his own status as the messiah that vacillates between portraying himself as either divine or mortal. As the third messiah after Melchizedek and Jesus Christ (although he claims mortal parentage), there is the underlying expectation that he does indeed see himself as the reincarnation of his supernatural predecessors. Even having the power of Christ to carry out his mission lends itself to the argument that Koresh believed he was divine. However, there is also the running theme that he was nothing more than a man who carried on the tradition of the previous seven messengers who had no divine status. While scholars have discussed Koresh's theology, I have found none who have addressed this point directly. It is a point that will probably remain unresolved.

Koresh and his followers believed that few people could find the biblical passage that contained the Seven Seals, and even fewer could understand the complexity of the text if they did (Reavis, 1995:106). Koresh believed that he was born to fulfill the prophetic deliverance of the seventh messenger (synonymous with the seventh angel mentioned in Revelation 11:15) even if the rest of humanity was ignorant of his predicted arrival and mission. Likewise, he believed that he took on the exclusive role of the Christ for all of humanity since he embodied the revealing Lamb of God who would herald the apocalypse.

To reinforce the apparent need for the return of the messiah to guide the elect into battle, Koresh remarked in his exegesis on the First Seal:

> Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant and that New Covenant is contained in the seven seals. If we the church have been so long awaiting that which must be hereafter, why is it that so many of us in Christendom have not even heard of the seven seals? (Koresh, 1994:5).

For Koresh, a distinct discrepancy existed in people's beliefs between the expectation of the messiah and the events that signaled the End Times. As the messiah, Koresh sensed that he filled the elect's role as the mediator.

Koresh felt disdain for those who were unable to grasp fully the concept of the world needing a messiah to decode

and interpret the seals for humanity. He translated this disdain into an interesting argument:

> If the seals were given to the servants of God, and you didn't really understand them ...you weren't really a servant. But one could want to serve God, without really being able, Koresh and his lieutenants [said]. One became able, became a servant of God, by *learning* the Seals [emphasis mine] (Reavis, 1995:106).

Koresh believed that only through his efforts could the seals be revealed and given meaning. The efforts that one put into understanding the seals were fruitless without Koresh's wisdom. For him, there was a differentiation between a passive and an active role in the events of the future. If one takes a passive attitude to Scripture, then, according to Koresh, it is only natural that a true understanding is beyond people's abilities. The Seals held an esoteric meaning and consequently, if an individual lacked the compulsion to learn Scripture and strive to become a servant of God, then the ignorant would suffer the appropriate punishment for their lack of enlightenment.

Following the prophetic tradition, Koresh tried to spread his message to as many people as he could through his exegesis, but he knew that the esoteric message would fall on many deaf ears. To fulfill his role as messenger, Koresh tried to write his exegesis[20] for an outside audience

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[20] The outside audience Koresh sought, however, did not receive his exegesis until after his death, having been carried out by Ruth Riddle, a survivor of the April 19 fire. Both Koresh's lawyer, Dick DeGuerin, and the FBI were given

(Arnold and Tabor, 1994:15), and broadcast his sermons over local radio stations during the siege. From Koresh's perspective, those outside Ranch Apocalypse who did not hear his message stood as little a chance of joining him during the Rapture as those who ignored the message they heard. Refusing to accept his message even and especially in this time of crisis with the FBI was (Koresh felt) a great sin against God.

Ironically, those who should have listened to his sermons were the FBI, but instead, they termed his sermons "Bible Babble" and ignored the message contained therein completely. Sociologically, this "Bible Babble" was a significant indication regarding Koresh's messianic worldview, and was an instrumental aspect in both the Davidian's downfall and in the governmental actions taken against them. The government agencies should have realized that Koresh's messianic worldview formed the apocalyptic framework through which all societal conflicts, pressures, and concerns would be interpreted within his religious community. As such, members would understand each element, individual, and institution in a confrontation with the Davidians on a cosmic level. The warnings in the "Bible

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prior knowledge of Koresh's intentions on April 14, 1993, through a letter Koresh gave to DeGuerin, which promised a completed manuscript of an exegesis of the Seven Seals. Because of the fire and Koresh's death, the manuscript was incomplete, but given to the public as Koresh had wanted.

Babble" were an obvious indication of the Davidians' worldview, and could have provided necessary information even if not heard with the ears of faith.

Despite the FBI's dismissal of Koresh's apocalyptic worldview, the conflict and miscommunication that arose between the Davidians and the FBI was not based exclusively on theology. Other social and political factors contributed to the outcome of April 19, 1993, playing a significant role in the Davidians' and government's reactions to the situation.

Messianism, Koresh, and Societal Reactions

Although Koresh's theological worldview figured prominently in how the BATF and FBI approached the Davidians beginning on February 28, 1993, other secular concerns shaped the government's strategy of dealing with the Davidians during the Waco conflict. These secular concerns included an underlying political framework that set government agents against each other, miscommunications between the Davidians and government officials, allegations of sexual and physical abuse that had their basis solely in former members' testimony, and a general lack of compromise on both sides. The sociological perspective used here illustrates how all these elements combined to create the

highly charged environment of the siege, while taking into account Koresh's ever-present theological worldview.

The Political Framework and Contributing Circumstances

The purpose of examining the political context out of which the Branch Davidian conflict arose is akin to looking at the situation John addressed when writing the Book of Revelation for his community. Just as John's use of the apocalyptic framework reflected both his surroundings and in turn the message he gave to Christians, so too does Koresh's use of apocalyptic rhetoric reflect the Branch Davidians' situation prior to and during the Waco siege and their worldview. Since both John and Koresh wrote in response to environmental pressures to address a concern of their time, how the Davidians fitted into the larger political situation is fundamental in understanding their reactions to the government.

Major political events were occurring in the United States around the time of the Waco conflict. First, there was a shift from a Republican government to a Democratic one when Bill Clinton was elected in November 1992. With his election came the appointment of Janet Reno as the new Attorney General, who was sworn in March 12. The two public officials brought with them a change in attitude into the White House and the Justice Department, respectively. While

Clinton signaled a change in some policies from the previous Republican government,[21] Reno symbolized a new strength and did not shy away from confrontation or responsibility.[22] The Davidian conflict, which began thirteen days before her swearing in, would test her strength of character, and the wisdom of her decisions. Ultimately, she would be blamed for the tragic results.

Further adding to the charged political climate surrounding the siege were the decisions made by the Davidians, the BATF, and the FBI. The decisions made were the results of each group consciously and unconsciously reacting against one another and being affected by the particular threats and pressures that they believed existed (whether or not these pressures proved real). A bungled game of chess is an appropriate analogy to the actions that took place during the fifty-one day siege.

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[21] The Clinton administration supported trying to "remove the remaining restrictions on the use of the military in law [local and federal] enforcement" (Kopel and Blackman, 1997:339). This policy might have affected the events of the Waco siege by increasing the perceived pressure the Davidians might have felt surrounded by the Texas National Guard. See Kopel and Blackman for further discussion.

[22] Reno "supported trailblazing programs to attack child abuse, drug abuse, and domestic violence" (Anderson, 1994:105) throughout her career. It comes as no surprise then, that her decision to gas the Mount Carmel residents was influenced (to a large degree) by the child abuse allegations that were rampant.

Months prior to the beginning of the raid, the BATF, rather than the FBI, initiated the investigation into the groups' activities. The Davidians first gained the attention of the BATF nine months prior to the "dynamic entry" when:

> ...a United Parcel Service driver learned that the package he was delivering to Mt. Carmel contained dummy hand grenades. [B]ATF officers, alerted by the local sheriff's department, followed the lead, and through shipping and sales records found that some 90 pounds of powdered aluminum had also been dropped off there. Powdered aluminum, when mixed with black gunpowder--also on the delivery notice--can be used to make grenades, and grenades are on a list of 'destructive devices' prohibited by federal firearms laws. But powdered aluminum and gunpowder can also be used for reloading spent rifle cartridges, a common and legal activity (Reavis, 1995:33).

The problem the government had was in ascertaining whether the purpose of the shipments was illegal activities. Upon later examination during congressional hearings it appeared that the warrant obtained allowing the BATF to raid the compound lacked convincing evidence to support a search. No solid evidence existed suggesting that the Davidians' purpose in receiving the powders was the manufacturing of illegal weapons. "It was only after the disappointing news about [the] lack of probable cause for a search warrant that the BATF began to contact former members and relatives of Branch Davidians directly," (Hall, 1995:221) hoping to

reapply for a warrant on the damaging testimony provided by these apostates (Hall, 1995:221).

The issue that stems from this gathering of apostate testimony, however, is not whether the apostates' testimonies were true, but whether their testimonies biased the government's decision process. If the testimonies helped create a biased and hostile environment towards the Davidians, then surely this environment affected all decisions made by the BATF from that point on. Clearly, strong evidence found during and after the siege supports the theory that there were ongoing illegal activities occurring on the compound, but the way in which the authorities initiated the conflict with the Davidians demonstrates that the governmental mindset was tainted and influenced by unfounded abuse allegations at the time of the raid. Based on neighbors' testimony, the BATF's weapons investigation should have focused on the accounts of ".50-calibre...and automatic weapons fire, ...discharg[ing] semiautomatics..., [and] hear[ing] a loud explosion at the Compound, accompanied by a large cloud of gray smoke. [No individual] had a license or a permit to use explosives at the Compound" (Department of Justice, 1993:26-27). As a result of the BATF's choice to raid the Davidians rather than serve Koresh personally with a warrant when he was

outside of the compound, the Davidians reacted as their theological worldview prepared them to--apocalyptically. Viewed within the Davidians' theology, the final battle between the 'Babylonians and the elect' began when the BATF raided their compound. Drawing upon the Book of Revelation for some historical support, Koresh believed that they were reenacting the battle in which Christ defeated his enemy, who "w[ould] not be found any longer" (Rev 18:21).

From the outset of the governmental investigation and subsequent siege of the Mount Carmel compound, the BATF classified the Branch Davidians as a fringe religious movement that was committing crimes within the compound walls. "The identification of the Mount Carmel community as a 'cult' carrie[d] a self-evident force in [the application of the warrant]...; he [BATF agent Davy Aguilera] use[d] the term itself fourteen times in the affidavit, without any significant qualifications" (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995:101).[23] Furthermore, the belief that the Mount Carmel

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[23] Numerous perceptions exist concerning cults, which likely influenced Aguilera's own understanding of the Branch Davidians. Common perceptions include: members only belonging to the group because the leader 'brainwashed' them; members having no individual thought and are all unintelligent and violent; they perform ritual sex and abuse; and, their beliefs are always strange, extreme, and dangerous. Unless Aguilera researched the Branch Davidians to see if any (or to what degree) of these perceptions were warranted, he probably carried his own bias against the group into his decisions.

compound was home to a cult prodded the BATF into examining elements that were beyond their scope and jurisdiction. While at the start of their investigation, the BATF concentrated on the "stockpiling [of] arms and other weapons" (Department of Justice, 1993:17), the Bureau's awareness of a previous Children's Protective Service investigation[24] concerning allegations of physical and sexual abuse influenced the government's perception of the Davidians and how they proceeded with their own investigation of the group. The official stance of the BATF was to pursue:

> [t]he primary violations within ATF's jurisdiction...[which included] (1) the illegal manufacture of machineguns from component parts...and (2) the illegal manufacture and possession of destructive devices, including explosive bombs and explosive grenades and the material necessary to produce such items (Department of Justice, 1993:24-25).

The allegations of child abuse, however, resurfaced throughout the siege, and most significantly when the Attorney General, Janet Reno, approved using CS gas in an attempt to end the standoff (Department of Justice, 1995:215).

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[24] Although the February 27, and April 6, 1992, Child Protective Services' (CPS) investigation did not provide Sparks with enough evidence to further the BATF's investigation, the seed of Koresh's guilt remained in the minds of the CPS and BATF agencies.

Ending the child abuse became a paramount theme in the course of action the government took towards the Davidians, which ultimately resulted in tragedy. The logic behind the use of abuse allegations in determining what plan to utilize was that if the allegations had any merit, then it would provide, in large part, adequate justification for both the "dynamic entry" and the end to the fifty-one day siege. At the time of the CS gas attack, however, foremost in the FBI's mind were the child abuse claims, which in retrospect, lacked solid and tangible evidence. This belief biased all of the government's decisions and proved to be the single most addressed aspect during the siege.

Contributing further to the growing polarized attitudes the BATF and Davidians had, the Davidians knew, prior to the raid, that the BATF planned to enter the compound on February 28. The planned 'surprise raid,' affectionately named "Operation Trojan Horse" by the brass and "Showtime" by the BATF agents (Reavis, 1995:33), had been practiced by agents so that "[f]ull control was to be achieved in 60 seconds. There was no contingency plan for loss of surprise. Peaceful entry was not rehearsed, nor was announcement of who the raiding party was, or the existence of a search warrant" (Kopel and Blackman, 1997:96).

The BATF was so confident in their plan that they called in the media. "Accordingly, on the weekend of the raid a [B]ATF public affairs officer telephoned local news reporters in Dallas informing them that a major Bureau operation was pending" (Leppard, 1993:40). The BATF did not give an exact date or location, but due to the coincidental timing of a newspaper article by the *Waco Tribune-Herald* that was in print the morning of February 28, 1993, reporters only needed the opportunity to put the pieces together. The article focused on Koresh, 'The Sinful Messiah,' who stockpiled weapons and abused children. Drawing the conclusion that the raid would be at the Mount Carmel compound, reporter flocked to the compound. It is likely that Koresh himself could have read the paper, or would have known someone who did, who would have given him advance warning of the raid.

Furthermore, evidence shows that Koresh would have found out about the impending raid from one of his members who was driving back from his postal job when he:

> ...noticed a television photographer who appeared to be lost. When Jones [the Davidian member] pulled up to see if he could help [him]...the newsman saw the familiar US Postal Service markings on his van, [so he]...warned [Jones], 'There's going to be a big gunfight with these religious nuts over here. You better get out.' Jones thanked the man politely and drove straight back to the compound (Leppard, 1993:40).

There can be little doubt that Koresh knew about the BATF raid, and prepared his members for the inevitable confrontation. Preparing for this confrontation also strengthened the group's cohesiveness, making them more reliant on one another.

The conflict escalated dramatically when the BATF went forward with the practiced plan, they too having been informed prior to the raid by the BATF's own agent that the element of surprise no longer existed:

> At the Davidians' trial, several BATF agents admitted they knew the element of surprise had been lost. An hour before the attack began, Robert Rodriguez, the undercover agent who had been in the Mount Carmel Center, told his superior, Chuck Sarabyn, that Koresh was aware of the impending attack....Sarabyn responded by simply asking what Koresh was wearing and if he was armed (Kopel and Blackman, 1997:96).

If knowledge of the impending raid existed on the Davidians' side, the BATF's decision to move forward with the planned raid necessarily created an environment that seemed persecutory. The Davidians relied on the apocalyptic framework depicted in Daniel 11:40-12:13, Psalms 2 and 89, and most prominently in the Book of Revelation, to deal with this persecution, and Koresh believed that the apocalypse was occurring now. The verses collectively described the coming of the enemy, and the ultimate victory for the Lord's followers when the messiah breaks the seals, signaling the "end of the age" (Daniel 12:13) and calling the elect to

battle. Koresh and his followers prepared themselves to be the elect fighting their enemy in the final battle. The polarized attitudes were now entrenched in the Davidians' minds.

Theologically, these combined passages present an informed reader with a clear indication that the conflict between the BATF and the Davidians was likely being interpreted from a polarized, apocalyptic perspective. This attitude, however, is not unique in history, and recalls earlier conflicts that occurred in the name of religion. From a fundamentalist Christian perspective, the conflict between the BATF and the Davidians reenacts the Roman persecution of the Christians, and this analogy drove the Davidians to believe more strongly in Koresh's teachings. Time and time again, Koresh spoke of this outcome, predicting the persecutory confrontation. To his members, the conflict with the BATF only reinforced the apocalyptic scenario about which Koresh had warned them.

The conversations, for example, that Koresh had with the BATF, the sermons aired on the radio, and Koresh's behavior were indicative of the group's perception of the dire situation in which they found themselves. As such, the Davidians believed that if the pressure did not ease, then the apocalyptic chronology depicted in Revelation was

nearing its foretold completion, despite Koresh having predicted that it would occur in Jerusalem at a later time. The government, however, did not understand the theological context of the situation that they helped perpetuate. They further complicated and exacerbated the crisis situation when they began scrutinizing Koresh's behavior towards both his own children and others in the community. This scrutiny, focusing on allegations of sexual misconduct, continued to drive the Davidians and the BATF apart in their understanding of each other, and was another instance where the biblical references were lost on government negotiators and investigators. The more Koresh tried to explain and justify his actions through Scriptural references, the more the FBI believed he was unstable and potentially dangerous.

Child Abuse: Physical and Sexual Allegations

The allegations that Koresh abused children both physically and sexually are perhaps the most complex and emotionally influential element in the BATF's decision to raid the Mount Carmel compound. The allegations also prove to be essential in the FBI's handling of the conflict. The claims further help to illustrate Koresh's unalterable belief that he was the Christ, the third and final manifestation of the Davidic line. As well, several government agencies prior to and during the siege knew about

Koresh's supposed victimization of the children under his control. Koresh's alleged systematic abuse of children became an emotional issue that stirred protective feelings in the government and the media, and became a rallying point for Attorney General Reno in justifying the CS gas attack (Ellison and Bartkowski, 1995:112; Kopel and Blackman, 1997:204). Clearly, the significance of the child abuse claims went beyond providing the government with a justification for using force against the Davidians, and became the central issue that affected the outcome of the Waco siege.[25]

The theological framework through which Koresh interpreted every element of his world provided him with a reason to believe that all of his supposed sexual relations with both adults and children followed the divine message that God gave humanity in the Bible:

> Koresh maintained that the purpose of [his sexual] liaisons was to produce children who would rule in God's kingdom. Indeed, some accounts suggest that Koresh believed that these children existed in heaven prior to their birth in this world, and that his goal was to fulfill the prophecy in Revelation [4:4] by bringing twenty-four children into the world...for the future leadership of a geopolitical kingdom to be based in Israel (Ellison and Bartkowski, 1995:130-131).

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[25] It should be noted again that all allegations could not be proven conclusively at the time of initiating the raid nor when Reno chose to use the CS gas. During House Judiciary subcommittee hearings after the siege, Kiri Jewell, 14, gave further testimony concerning the abuse that occurred while she lived at Mount Carmel with her mother (Pressley, 1995:A1).

To someone outside of Koresh's theological cosmology, this interpretation is a rather far-reaching interpretation of: "[a]nd around the throne *were* twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones *I saw* twenty-four elders sitting clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads" (Rev 4:4).

This passage, along with Rev 14:3-4, made it clear to his followers that he was the only one who rightfully held the duty to spread his seed:

> [t]he one hundred and fourty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth [were] ...the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they are celibates. These *are* the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb (Rev 14:3-4).

He took the exclusive patriarchal role of spreading the reputedly divine genes[26] as part of his divine purpose. "Koresh preached that as the 'Lamb of God' only his 'seed' was pure, meaning that only he could have sex with the pubescent girls and women in the compound, and that none of the men could have sex"[27] (Department of Justice, 1993:207).

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[26] Again, Koresh's own ambiguous perception of his role as a divine or mortal being surfaces in this part of his theology. If he alone can spread the divine genes, then it seems he sees himself as divine while maintaining the character of the 'sinful messiah' who is mortal.

[27] Leaders of sectarian communities, which are not always millenarian, often maintain exclusive sexual rights and control over members. It is not uncommon for leaders to believe that if one pairs off with another member of the group, then one's love is channeled away from the group and the leader. "So...[sectarian] leaders develop ways to ensure that allegiance goes to the top, not sideways in pair bonding" (Singer and Lalich, 1995:321).

In the Justice Department's report on the Waco incident, former Davidian member and compound resident Jeannine Bunds claimed that "Howell [Koresh] annuls all marriages of couples who join his cult. He then has exclusive sexual access to the women" (Department of Justice, 1993:218).

Once again Koresh provided his members with a theologically based justification of his behavior. Beginning with passages in II Samuel 23:8-39 and I Chronicles 11:10-14:3, Koresh's justification began by the introduction of the mighty men of David.[28] These mighty men are:

> ...heavily armed disciples whom [the King] most trusted. The Mighty Men [sic] were so dedicated to the Lamb or King David, whom they saw as God, that they happily gave their wives to him. If the men desisted from sexual relations in this world they would find their perfect mates in Heaven, their future partners emerging from a spare rib as Adam had first created Eve (Leppard, 1993:141).

Without any additional Adventist theology supporting Koresh's doctrine beyond the naming of the mighty men and a record of their battles in the Hebrew Bible, Koresh personalized and embellished the story surrounding these loyal biblical warriors to the extent that he created a biblical justification for his doctrine. He also created an

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[28] There is no direct reference to either II Samuel or I Chronicles in Koresh's writings, but I argue that because Koresh possessed a learned knowledge of Scripture, his allusions (and subsequent interpretation of) to these passages are meant to provide textual support for his doctrine of polygamy.

analogous situation between the sacrifices expected of the mighty men and the sacrifices expected of the men within the compound.

Without interference or competition from anyone within the compound, Koresh possessed complete sexual freedom and control over the women and children. As the leader of the Davidians, Koresh's authority was supreme in the Mount Carmel compound, and consequentially he did not even believe his authority was challenged by state and federal laws concerning abuse and statutory rape. Because of his divine mission he was not governed by these laws since they were not applicable to a messiah.

The doctrine of polygamy, for instance, applied only to Koresh. It was forbidden to the rest of the members at Mount Carmel (and in the state of Texas), but was espoused as a key way of living by the whole community. Although Koresh legally married only Rachel Jones (who at the time of her marriage was only 14 years old),[29] allegations exist suggesting that Koresh had many 'wives,' in the sense of spiritual bonds. Former Davidians described Koresh as having many women he considered to be his wives, which included both children and women. These so called wives were given the star of David as the symbol of their spiritual

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[29] In the state of Texas, a fourteen year old can get married if parents and/or a judge give permission.

marriage. Again, the justification for his polygamous manner was biblical:

> One of Howell's...definitions [of marriage] was drawn from Deuteronomy 22:28-29, 'If a man finds a damsel that is a virgin, which is not betrothed, and lay hold on her, and lie with her, and they be found; Then...she shall be his wife; because he hath humbled her, he may not put her away all his days.'...Spiritual wedding vows were exchanged, Howell taught, whenever attractions developed (Reavis, 1995:113).

Koresh also "had talked about having sex with Michelle [Jones] when she was fourteen....[O]nce taken as his new 'wife' ...[the] girls [chosen by Koresh] were involved in continuing relations with [him], intermittently being taken into his bedroom to spend the evening with him"[30] (Department of Justice, 1993:220-221). Claims similar to these allegations of abuse with minors are numerous, and

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[30] Numerous accounts specify the names of Koresh's alleged other 'wives,' along with the various ways Koresh prepared them for this role. Scattered throughout the reports and analyses of Koresh are instructions to young, undeveloped girls how to "use tampons to prepare themselves for [Koresh's] sexual relations with [them]" (Ellison and Bartkowski, 1995:129). These accounts range from eyewitness testimony (Jeannine Bunds, Kiri Jewell, and Alison Manning, who were prominent government witnesses) to Children's Protective Services investigator Joyce Sparks who interviewed child abuse claims and spoke with former members. The complexity of the whole situation with its claims and counter-claims, however, is not the focus of this chapter, which only intends to introduce certain elements that showcase how convoluted the situation and circumstances were to the government. To read further on the aspects of alleged abuses occurring on the compound, see Ellison and Bartkowski, 1995:111-149; the Justice Report, 1993:215-227; and Reavis, 1995:68-69.

take on a new dimension when added to the claims that Koresh beat misbehaving children.

Several eyewitness accounts exist that describe Koresh beating the eight-month-old daughter of a member (Michelle Tom) "for some forty minutes, until the little girl's bottom was bruised and bleeding, because she refused to sit on his lap" (Ellison and Bartkowski, 1995:120). A second reported incident dealt with "Vernon vigorously punish[ing] his son Cyrus approximate[ly] 5 years of age using a wooden paddle on his bottom, hitting him repeatedly" (Department of Justice, 193:224). Although these claims were not proven, they warranted bringing in the Children's Protective Services again during the siege. Joyce Sparks investigated the case and found that there was not "sufficient evidence to probe further" (Tabor and Gallagher, 1995:101-102). Despite the official stance of the CPS not being able to prove any of the abuse allegations, an underlying belief persisted among government officials who maintained that Koresh was guilty of abuse--abuse that he continued to perpetrate throughout the entire Waco siege. As previously mentioned, the BATF received the warrant to search the compound only after the inclusion of the abuse allegations in the application for a search warrant.

Despite all the beliefs and suppositions, in the end the Justice Department's report notes that "there was no direct evidence establishing that any children were being either sexually or physically abused during the February 28 through April 19 time period" (Department of Justice, 1993:226). Janet Reno said, however, "I now understand that nobody in the bureau [FBI] told me that [the child abuse] was ongoing. We were briefed, and I misunderstood.... I thought that there was actual evidence after February 28th of ongoing child abuse" (Seper, 1993:A1). Evidently, though, the government's utilization of prior sexual and physical abuse claims reinforced the perceived need for government intervention in the Waco conflict.

Although abuse allegations made for an emotionally compelling argument, acting upon this belief was the tragic flaw in the government's approval of the CS gas to resolve the standoff. When assessing the benefits and the drawbacks of the plan, the FBI should have been taken into greater consideration the history of the gas. The tear gas that Reno approved had a long history of use over the last fifty years. Its use began as a method of controlling rioters during the early 1950s, as well as in armed conflicts in Cyprus, Korea, and Vietnam (because it induced burning sensations to exposed skin [Hall, 1994:B5]). Before

approving the plan, Reno asked the FBI about the effect the gas would have on both children and the elderly, and the agency reportedly told her that the CS gas attack would have no permanent effect on the compound's residents (Seper and Kellman, 1995:A1). The decision the Attorney General needed to make, therefore, was whether to act upon the advice of experts who suggested certain courses of action. Save a few dissenters, the primary message that Reno received from her surrounding experts was that there was abuse occurring during the siege at the compound, that the gas would not be harmful to children, and that the FBI believed that "Koresh was a dangerous sociopath who would respond only to force" (Tabor, 1995:277).

Conclusion

In a final irony, the CS attack that was to protect the children and end the standoff ultimately led to the death of over 80 people, including 59 adults and 21 children. The polarized attitude prevailed, and the fiery apocalyptic vision that Koresh believed would signal the end occurred, but only for those who shared his theology. The greatest tragedy surrounding the Waco siege was that "the FBI actually held within its control the ability to influence Koresh's [biblical] interpretation [of the apocalypse], and thus, his actions" (Tabor, 1995:271). Had the FBI realized

that they could manipulate the apocalyptic framework upon which Koresh built his worldview, then the outcome could have been different. Rather than contributing to the animosity and persecutory feelings of the Davidians, the BATF and FBI could have changed their approach and dealt with the group in a less confrontational manner. Little did the FBI know that its confrontational manner with the Davidians would be, in part, the basis of further tragic events only two years later, at exactly 9:02 am, April 19, 1995.

Chapter Three: *The Turner Diaries*

Thematically, *The Turner Diaries* follows the basic apocalyptic patterns, the framework, and the concerns presented in the Book of Revelation and utilized by the Branch Davidians. The four basic apocalyptic elements that appear in *The Turner Diaries* are the use of symbols, visions of an impending cosmic catastrophe, a parallel between past political situations and present ones, and finally, a struggle to achieve a utopic world (Montague, 1992:17-18).

While *The Turner Diaries* does not profess or promote itself as a theological text, upon close examination it nonetheless does possess many apocalyptic attributes.[31] The novel illustrates the millenarian apocalyptic visions and beliefs of a fictional group named The Order, which exemplifies a non-religious movement layering a secular concern upon an intrinsically theological framework. The result is a movement that has based itself upon a theological premise, but which is not overtly religious, having shaped the theological premise to fit its own worldview, creating doctrines rigidly adhered to in the contemporary world by right-wing fundamentalist movements. To analyze both the link between theology and secularism,

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[31] Although a technical difference exists between apocalypticism and millenarianism, the overlap is such that, unless otherwise noted, I use the terms interchangeably to discuss elements of the apocalyptic genre as a whole.

and the use of the 'empty' apocalyptic framework, both a textual and sociological approach serves best. To bridge the seeming chasm, I return to a framework outlined by Cohn in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, which described the implications of apocalyptic religious beliefs acting as a phenomenon that manifests itself in societal actions in a multitude of forms.

The Apocalyptic Framework Found in *The Turner Diaries*

The first of Cohn's criteria for classifying apocalyptic groups is that salvation is collective, and will be enjoyed by those who have faith in the prescribed doctrines (Cohn, 1970:13). This element features prominently in *The Turner Diaries*, whose driving theme is the creation of a world where Whites remain separate from other ethnic and religious groups, and the faithfuls' actions reflect the collective's doctrines:

> Those who were admitted [to the Organization][32] --and that meant only children, women of childbearing age, and able-bodied men willing to fight in the Organization's ranks--were subjected to much more severe racial screening than had been used to separate Whites from non-Whites in California. It was no longer sufficient to be merely White; in order to eat one had to be judged the bearer of especially valuable genes... [In addition,] any White man wanting admission to the [Organization] was marked with an indelible dye, and he was turned out and could be readmitted permanently only by bringing back the head

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[32] The Organization is the name of the group in the novel that is trying to bring about the apocalypse. Its members are in direct conflict with the System.

> of a freshly killed Black or other non-White (Macdonald, 1980:206-207).

To gain admittance into the collective, an individual member must prove his or her willingness and ability to join the collective.

The second characteristic Cohn believes millenarian groups possess is that the shared apocalypse is to be terrestrial. This characteristic focuses on the Second Coming and the actualization of the Kingdom of God on earth. The premillennialist view is particularly useful in understanding the ideas contained in *The Turner Diaries*, because of the direct parallels between it and Macdonald's ideology.

Premillennialism contends that Christ's believers will meet Him before the tribulation in order to usher in the millennium on earth, which is a time of incredible prosperity and righteousness. In *The Turner Diaries*, the Aryan collective ushers in what it believes to be the earthly millennium of peace and moral correctness, after undergoing the final tribulation that lasted for eight years:[33]

> [I]t was in the year 1999, according to the chronology of the Old Era--just 110 years after the birth of the Great One[34]--that the dream of a

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[33] Coincidentally, the final tribulation period for premillennialists is strikingly similar--seven years (Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, 1989:4)

[34] The Great One is Adolf Hitler, born April 20, 1889.

> White world finally became a certainty. And it was the sacrifice of the lives of uncounted thousands of brave men and women of the Organization during the preceding years which had kept that dream alive until it could no longer be denied (Macdonald, 1980:210).

The numerous premillennial references and symbolic Christian analogies made in this passage deserve further elaboration.

Premillennialist followers of Christ know that the millennium is upon them when "a great apostasy, wars, famines, ...the appearance of the Antichrist, and a great tribulation" (Clouse, 1977:8) occur in this terrestrial realm. These events signal great changes at the beginning of God's Kingdom on earth as depicted in Revelation 5-8. Literally or symbolically, all these elements appear in *The Turner Diaries*.

The following passage alludes to the great apostasy, for instance:

> Katherine had been apolitical. If anyone had asked her during the time she was working for the government or, before that, when she was a college student, she would have probably said she was a "liberal." But she was liberal only in the mindless, automatic way that most people are. Without really thinking about it or trying to analyze it, she superficially accepted the unnatural ideology peddled by the mass media and the government (Macdonald, 1980:29).

A contrast exists between the fictional apathy felt by most of society towards politics, race, and social issues (Macdonald, 1980:29), and the commitment Katherine, a dedicated Aryan member, shows towards these issues. This

apathetic attitude the people have towards important ideological issues gives the impression that this era really is the beginning of the millennium, since the apostasy of the government and media is already so prominent. Other signs, such as war and famine, reinforce the idea of the nascent millennium by creating an atmosphere filled with tension, strife, and change.

The chaotic atmosphere of the coming millennium continues with the mention of war and famine that appears throughout the novel. The first paragraph of the novel illustrated that the much talked about war is here, with the implication that it eventually would lead to the creation of the terrestrial Kingdom of God:

> September 16, 1991. Today it finally began! After all these years of talking--and nothing but talking--we have finally taken our first action. We are at war with the System, and it is no longer a war of words (Macdonald, 1980:1).

The war of the believers against the non-believers has begun, and it will be a hard fought battle that ultimately will end with the victory of the Aryan collective. Again, this event parallels the description of the first seal's opening (Rev 6:1), which is the emergence of the white horse with a bow and crown (representing war). Interestingly, although there is no formal indication that Macdonald drew his apocalyptic visions from the Book of Revelation, the echoes are apparent despite *The Turner Diaries'* secular

appearance. As Tom Thatcher theorizes, the use of the empty narrative in which one "textualiz[es] ...[and] plac[es]... oneself within the rhetorical structure, [thereby] becoming a present participant in an ongoing salvation history" (Thatcher, 1998:550) is a fundamental aspect of *The Turner Diaries*, even though it may not be a conscious decision.

What also becomes apparent from this and other similar passages, is a familiar attitude taken towards the government, which represents the non-believers. A clear separation exists between the Aryans and those who follow the System, making polarization a pervading doctrinal aspect of the Aryans' worldview. As we have seen, this attitude figured prominently in the Branch Davidian's theological perspective (the BATF/FBI being the Babylonians and the Davidians taking on the role of the elect), as well as in the conflict between the Christians and the Roman emperors. The theme's pervasiveness in the Book of Revelation, in Branch Davidian theology, and in *The Turner Diaries*, supports a pattern of crisis and subsequent social action that leads to conflict. A group's social activities necessarily reflect its central motivating worldview, and the three aforementioned examples clearly demonstrate the potentially volatile relationship between action and belief patterns.

In addition to the non-believers being symbolized by the government in the war against the elect, famine (the black horse depicted in Rev 6:5) also makes its presence felt before the realization of the Kingdom of God. Although the Aryan members of the Organization are able to provide their members with sustenance, non-members, whether or not they are White, do not fare well:

> Food became critically scarce everywhere during the winter of 1993-1994. The Blacks lapsed into cannibalism...while hundreds of thousands of starving Whites, who earlier had ignored the Organization's call for a rising against the System, began appearing at the borders of the various liberated zones begging for food. The Organization was only able to feed the White population already under its control by imposing the severest rationing, and it was necessary to turn many of the latecomers away (Macdonald, 1980:206).

As the war against the System and the non-believers drew closer to the imminent coming of the millennium, the severity of the conditions increase. Even the members of the collective are subject to states of hunger bordering on famine, so it is no surprise that non-members did not find enough food. Only through the strength and righteousness of the adherents was anyone able to survive this premillennial upheaval, and Macdonald carefully crafted an unflattering portrayal of those who did not possess the proper moral and ethical righteousness.

The mention of cannibalism heightens *The Turner Diaries*'s asserted distinction between blacks and whites. Cannibalism is the most extreme behavior an individual can resort to in times of famine, and it is significant that only blacks in the novel engage in it.[35] Macdonald forcefully asserts that blacks are unfit for the Kingdom of God--an assertion that is part of his differentiation between those worthy of inclusion and those requiring exclusion.

Another sign marking the coming millennium is the appearance of the Antichrist (who figures prominently in Revelation 13). In *The Turner Diaries*, however, this sign is symbolic rather than literal. The Organization sees the System, and the Jews who allegedly run it, as the Antichrist.[36] Consequently, in this novel, Armageddon (Rev 16:16) becomes the fight between the Aryans and Jews. During this final battle for supremacy:

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[35] Also significant is the wording of the distinction. Macdonald says that the Blacks "lapsed into cannibalism," implying that they were barely human themselves and alluding either to a return to some past patterns of behavior, or an extreme apostasy capable of prompting them to act so atrociously.

[36] Although in Revelation the Antichrist allegedly refers to Nero (an identifiable figure), Pierce chooses to envision the role as a composite figure. He created an archetypal image which represents every evil characteristic he believes the Jews possess. There is no single figure upon which he focuses his hatred, but combines elements from powerful Jewish men whom he sees as corrupt.

> ...the governments of France and the Netherlands, both rotten to the core with Jewish corruption, have fallen... I'm sure the Jews are already making plans for a comeback, as soon as the people have calmed down and forgotten.... [But] [n]o matter how long it takes us and no matter to what lengths we must go, we'll demand a final settlement of the account between our two races. If the Organization survives the contest, no Jew will--anywhere. We'll go to the uttermost ends of the earth to hunt down the last of Satan's spawn[s][37] (Macdonald, 1980:198-199).

Unequivocally, to Macdonald and his Aryan brethren, Jews are the symbolic embodiment of everything evil and corrupt, and are the beast. The Jews are the most vilified of races and religions from Macdonald's perspective, and his novel builds upon the theme of vilification throughout.

Most probably, the intense demonization stems from the Aryans' belief that the Jews control the System, and in turn control all the other supposedly inferior races and religions. The black man, by Aryan accounts, follows the System rather than leads it, and is, therefore, much less of a threat to Aryan survival. All of the positions of power enjoyed by Jews in this novel, including most judges,

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[37] A theory that dates back centuries is that Jews are Satan's spawn. It takes its premise from the Adam and Eve story in Genesis 2, but in an interpretative addition to the story, attributes great evil to the serpent, describing it as, at first "a beast-a negro" (Barkun, 1994:160), and then as "the creature ...[that had] sexual relations with Eve and fathered Cain" (Barkun, 1994:161). This demonization of the Jews figured prominently in subsequent right-wing Christian movements, and recurs when attempting to show how the Jews are "the seed of the Devil through Cain" (Barkun, 1994:161). This theory continues to be prevalent today in many Christian Identity movements.

teachers, actors, and civic leaders (Macdonald, 1980:166), are positions used for corrupt ends, weakening people's ability to distinguish between good and evil. The masses have undergone brainwashing by the System, and therefore are under the control of the Antichrist. Most of society:

> ...ha[s] been brainwashed; they are weak and selfish; they have no sense of racial loyalty.... [Most] are morally neutral--incapable of distinguishing absolute right from absolute wrong... tak[ing] their cue from whoever is on the top at the moment (Macdonald, 1980:166).

For centuries, according to *The Turner Diaries*, the Jews have been at the top, influencing countless billions to follow ideologies incompatible with what the Aryans believe is the white man's natural destiny. The power the Roman empire (personified by Domitian) had over Christians[38] appears in Revelation: "And all who dwell on the earth will worship [the Antichrist], *every one* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain" (Rev 13:8). Only the Antichrist has enough power to achieve this all encompassing goal, and the power of the Antichrist culminates immediately before the millennium.

According to premillennial theory, the last sign marking the coming millennium is the final tribulation,

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[38] The paradigm one must apply here is that in contemporary times, the Jews subsume the control the Roman empire (the Antichrist) possessed and the Christians represent the twentieth century Aryans.

which in *The Turner Diaries* begins in September 1991 and ends on January 30, 1999 (Macdonald, 1980:209). The period of final tribulation, when the faithful members' beliefs are tested before the earthly Kingdom of God is realized, occurs during the eight years in which Macdonald situates his fictitious book. Interestingly, the novel created a feeling of suspense as to its outcome because the story happens in the past tense and the outcome is uncertain. The outcome is uncertain because of the monumental trials and tribulations the Organization must overcome before the anticipated millennium arrives. The text depicts the tribulation of the Organization during this eight year period, and from the retrospective point of view from which Macdonald wrote the novel, it is only in the last seven pages that the reader gains the final knowledge that the Organization was successful in the tribulation. The millennium does come, and is celebrated as a victory for the believers worldwide. "From the liberation of North America until the beginning of the New Era for our whole planet ...the most important obstacles to the Organization's worldwide victory were out of the way" (Macdonald, 1970:209).

In *The Turner Diaries*, however, the millennium has a secular name--the New Era (Macdonald, 1970:207). The term builds upon the religious concepts of the premillennial

apocalypse, whereby the result of the final battle between the elect and non-elect is the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth. Within current society, however, a tendency exists to move away from these theological concepts and toward secularized images. The secularization of an inherently religious concept is a result of "Christianity ha[ving] lost some, though by no means all, of its power to shape its followers' prosaic social attitudes and moral commitments" (Schwartz, 1970:10). Secularly based groups latch on to this deteriorating power in Western society, and incorporate into their ideologies the religious fragments still powerful enough to attract and maintain followers. These fragments of thought then become unified into potentially radical political--rather than religiously fundamental--ideologies capable of "interpret[ing] ordinary human affairs in terms of absolute good and evil," reminiscent of the religious ideologies they subsumed.

The ideology presented in *The Turner Diaries* reflects this incorporation of religious elements with the radically political, creating a group (The Order) that has, at its core, doctrines with a divine and sacred aura (Schwartz, 1970:11). Motivated by religious and political ideologies, these secular groups often employ a vocabulary that has religious and "ritual overtones" (Schwartz, 1970:12). This

is very much the case with the Aryan group in *The Turner Diaries*: "They talk about 'cleansing' the social fabric of 'impure,' subversive,' or 'reactionary' elements" (Schwartz, 1970:12).

In reputedly cleansing the collective of the impure, another action towards realizing the apocalypse occurs. Cohn's overarching characteristics of the millenarian sect describe the realization of the apocalypse as "imminent, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly" (Cohn, 1970:13). Although the final tribulation lasted longer in *The Turner Diaries* than the premillennialist theory contends, the millennium (or the worldwide takeover by the Organization):

> ...came in a great, Europe-wide rush in the summer and fall of 1999, as a cleansing hurricane of change swept over the continent, clearing away in a few months the refuse of a millennium or more of alien ideology and a century or more of profound moral and material decadence. The blood flowed ankle-deep in the streets...as the race traitors, [and] the offspring of generations of dysgenic breeding...met a common fate. Then the great dawn of the New Era broke over the Western world (Macdonald, 1980:209).

Macdonald portrays the New Era as an event on the verge of actualization. This imminence is the incentive for the radical changes that the Organization feels are necessary in society before the millennium comes about.

The Organization is akin to the prophet who has predicted a pre-planned course of events that will occur

only during the time of the prophet. The belief in a set plan for the future proves invaluable to both the prophet and the Organization, for the function of apocalyptic literature "is to shape [followers'] imaginative perception of a situation and so lay the basis for whatever course of action [the writer] exhorts" (Collins, 1984:32). The Organization calls for dramatic and radical action to prepare for the imminently foretold apocalypse in return for victory and celebration once the achievement of the goals occurs.

In addition to apocalyptic imminence, the millenarian characteristics that Cohn identified also focus on the magnitude of the coming destruction. According to him, millenarian believers expect that the apocalypse is to be "total, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present, but perfection of itself" (Cohn, 1970:13). Along these lines, Macdonald wrote his novel with a complete, worldly transformation in mind, and in the end the newly created Aryan society was the embodiment of perfection. With a hint of arrogance, Macdonald boldly proclaimed that Earl Turner, the main character in *The Turner Diaries*:

> ...helped greatly to assure that his race would survive and prosper, that the Organization would achieve its worldwide political and military

> goals, and that the Order would spread its wise and benevolent rule over the earth for all time to come (Macdonald, 1980:211).

The totality of change and salvation for the Aryan race is once again reminiscent of the saved "one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed" (Rev 7:4). Although *The Turner Diaries* portrays the elect as Aryans, it is likely that Macdonald unconsciously bastardized Revelation, interpreting the passage from the perspective that because of the second seed theory, the "one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from *every tribe of the sons of Israel*" [emphasis mine] (Rev 7:4) actually refers to the Aryans, discounting the Jews as illegitimate claimers of the title.

This totality of salvation is nothing short of supernatural. Macdonald even demonstratively points out the god-like qualities of wisdom and benevolence that the Organization possesses while overseeing this Kingdom of God on earth. Macdonald presents the New Era as the definitive picture of utopia, overcoming all imperfections and obstacles.

Cohn's final criterion for millenarian sects is that the apocalypse is to be "miraculous, in the sense that it is to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies" (Cohn, 1970:13). Of all the characteristics Cohn proposes, this is perhaps the most elusive and subtly mentioned element in *The Turner Diaries*. Despite its

subtlety in the text, the Organization does believe itself to be the instrument of God in the novel, and the chosen ones to act for Him:

> For the first time I understand the deepest meaning of what we are doing. I understand now why we cannot fail, no matter what we must do to win and no matter how many of us must perish in doing it. Everything that has been and everything that is yet to be depend[s] on us. We are truly the instruments of God in the fulfillment of His Grand Design[39] (Macdonald, 1980:71).

This claim of a supernatural power the group possesses as the only means of bringing about the Kingdom of God, or a New Era, is perhaps one of the most obvious hallmarks of sectarian groups.[40]

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[39] Incidentally, the Organization receiving supernatural help is not necessarily a contradiction between Turner's fictional worldview, and that of Pierce's personal worldview. In his daily life, Pierce "espouses the view that 'we ourselves are responsible for everything over which we have the power of choice'" (Mollins, 1995:42). This does not infringe upon Turner belonging to the chosen group to be the instruments of God, however, because one still possesses the choice between belonging to the Order--God's chosen group to realize the Grand Design--or belonging to those who ignore the call to become members (if, of course, one meets the Aryans' requirements).

[40] Numerous sectarian groups make the claim of being the only group capable of actualizing the millennium, and many of them share the National Alliance's underlying racial policies. These groups include the Aryan Nations, the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord, Elohim City, and The Order (to name just a few). The militancy of the groups is a result of their belief in a supernatural calling to bring about the millennium, and their need to fulfill this destiny. Having been given divine authority in their own eyes to carry out whatever measures are necessary to accomplish God's "Grand Design," believers will impose the Organization's beliefs on others, and enforce what their group sees as the boundaries of acceptable behavior. No longer does a clear boundary exist between fiction and

In *The Turner Diaries*, the supernatural element in realizing the millennium comes into play in an allegorical sense, in that individual sacrifices could potentially parallel the supernatural sacrifice of Jesus. Just as mainstream Christians believe that Jesus sacrificed himself for the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven with the help of God, so too must many individuals sacrifice themselves to procure God's aid in bringing about the New Era. The analogy between the sacrifices of Jesus and members of the elect extends to martyrs dying for the cause and thereby receiving immortality, as well as being born again in the chosen community.

In the spirit of martyrdom, members of the Organization receive the mission to serve in the righteous cause, and therefore must accomplish certain deeds that likely will result in death. In the group's ideology, the loss of a member's life is an acceptable risk to take if certain ends are attainable. Martyrdom also implies a continued existence in the group's ideological history. The added incentive provided by the group to encourage participation in dangerous missions is that if a member dies while doing

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reality, and these groups have little problem in acting out the events fictionally described in such works as *The Turner Diaries*. Timothy McVeigh is a clear example of this increasing trend of boundary shifting, where fiction is simply a constructed story with no potential to be acted upon.

so, then he or she will nevertheless gain immortality and be renown within the elect community:

> ...[E]ven though you die, you will continue to live in us and in our successors for as long as our Order endures, just as with any member who achieves Union and then loses his life. And if, by some chance, you should survive your mission, you may then take your place in [the] ranks [of the Union, a higher order within the Organization] (Macdonald, 1980:99).

Gaining immortality in the continued existence of the group and its followers is an exact parallel to what occurred with Jesus and Christianity. Essentially, as followers of Jesus reputedly found new life in Him, so too do the members of the Organization find a new existence when called upon to sacrifice themselves for the goals of the group. "Now our lives truly belong only to the Order, [the elite members of the Organization]. Today I was, in a sense born again" (Macdonald, 1980:74).

By having these direct correlations between fundamentalist Christian imagery and the Organization, the group's perceived goals receive magnification, becoming imbued with greater significance than they otherwise would have been. These parallels combine with the ultimate religious goal of bringing about the millennium and establishing the Kingdom of God on earth, and together they give members a purpose, and a feeling of belonging to a group worthy of membership (Schwartz, 1970:71-75). Whether

or not Macdonald intentionally used the apocalyptic framework and the parallels drawn from the Book of Revelation to create a recognizable form upon which to base his fictional account of the apocalypse, this is exactly what has occurred. The familiarity rings in readers' minds, and the expectation of a final victory for the righteous, whether they are Aryans or Christians, carries on to the end of the novel.

Membership in a group also means that there is an underlying ideology that orders the world of its adherents, uniting members in a common goal and belief in victory. As such, the "directing ideology... organizes the activities of the members of [the] group...[and] is of utmost concern to its adherents" (Schwartz, 1970:221). In exchange for immortality and the fulfillment of the group's goals, death then seems to be reasonable. The directing ideology in *The Turner Diaries* is so dominant that membership in the Organization depends on exclusive adherence to the religiously political and racial demands the group has developed. As a result, members "have only one alternative--to work in harmony with the forces that create the mandates--[thereby defining one's goals] in terms of these predetermined ends" (Schwartz, 1970:55).

The single-mindedness of purpose shown by the Organization therefore, is one of the main attractions of *The Turner Diaries*. It is not, however, the only attraction that entices prospective recruits and maintains the loyalty of veteran members. A unity of ideology attracts individuals and maintains group cohesion, as well as a belief that only in the sharing of this ideology will victory occur. The victory is, of course, the realization of the millennial Kingdom of God, and the initiation of the Aryan ideal world, the New Era.

Sociological Concerns and Implications of *The Turner Diaries*

The most obvious sociological element of *The Turner Diaries* is that William Pierce, the current head of the National Alliance, wrote the novel and acknowledges that it could be the blueprint for realizing the New Era. Pierce imbues the novel with National Alliance ideology, which develops and synthesizes particular interpretations of Christian theology and Scripture, Neo-Nazi ideologies,[41] and extreme militancy that occasionally cross the boundary separating fiction and reality. Although the novel describes the coming of the New Era, National Alliance

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[41] Pierce, a former member of the American Nazi Party, draws upon the basic Nazi principles of Aryan supremacy, separation (or elimination) of all non-Aryans, as well as the vision of global domination.

ideologies help illustrate how Pierce envisions the New Era, in both a fictional and real sense.

National Alliance ideology predicates itself on the beliefs of anti-semitism, racism, and White supremacy. According to Pierce, there must be: "'[a] thorough rooting out of Semitic and other non-Aryan values and customs everywhere' and [a] creation in North America and Western Europe of a 'racially clean area of the earth for the further development of our people'" (Mollins, 1995:43). As one of the numerous splinter groups from the American Nazi Party (Ridgeway, 1990:15), the National Alliance formed when William Pierce broke away from the more politically active National Youth Alliance to which he belonged after the American Nazi Party. After breaking his ties with his former organization, Pierce assumed the leadership role of the National Alliance, embodying the ideological worldview of his group.

In truth, however, Pierce's new worldview was not significantly different from the parent organization.[42] For instance, one major ideological element shared between the National Youth Alliance and the National Alliance was that the Jews conspired with one another to control key political

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[42] The decision Pierce made to split from the National Youth Alliance (NYA) was the result of a personal conflict with the co-founder of the NYA, Willis Carto, rather than any ideological differences.

and economic positions, thereby strengthening their conspiratorial hold over the world. In all likelihood, Pierce formed his own organization because of his desire for the power of leadership and not because of ideological differences with the National Youth Alliance.

His overall belief in Aryan dominance and the eventual disintegration of the Jewish power stronghold prevailed in the National Alliance doctrines as well as in most other White supremacy groups. Distinctions existed, however. One of these is Pierce's clear separation between his organization and ideology and those of the larger Christian Identity[43] movement, which strongly embraces the message in Pierce's writings. In an effort to distance himself from the Identity movement, Pierce said: "'The reason [Christian Identity] can't recruit anyone but uneducated hicks is that their doctrine is crazy'" (qtd. in Barkun, 1994:227). By

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[43] The Christian Identity organization bases itself, in some form, on the:

> ...quasi-theological theory [of the 1920s] called Christian Identity, which held that the Anglo-Saxons were the Lost Tribe of Israel and that Jews, blacks, and other people of color were inferiors sent to earth as a scourge of God. At the coming of the Apocalypse, Identity followers believe, the earth will be rid of these 'mud people,' and reserved for the only true Israelite people: white Aryans, whose sign of racial purity is their ability to blush, to have 'blood in the face" (Ridgeway, 1990:17).

This theory closely ties in with the Second Seed theory, previously mentioned.

appealing to the least educated elements in society, group organization is weak because there is no central figure who guides the movement. Pierce also believes that group leadership will bring about an era of Aryan purity in the future, whereas he believes Christian Identity fruitlessly focuses its attention on trying to recapture a time of Aryan purity in the past (Whitsel, 1998:188-189). Barkun, however, notes that it is ironic that despite Pierce's disavowal of the Identity movement, his novel is a mainstay in Identity readings, encapsulating their worldview. Moreover, the novel has become a fundamental handbook for the mechanical outline of the Aryans' plan for global domination (Barkun, 1994:226-227).

The underlying message of *The Turner Diaries* centers on three revolutionary fronts: 1) Aryans must take up arms and declare outright war on the government, 2) the social structures (i.e. banks, public schools, law makers) that continue to support and promulgate the Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG) must be destroyed and replaced by dedicated members of the Aryan cause (especially those of the quasi-monastic circle of Aryans known as The Order); and finally, 3) all inferior races must be eliminated in a genocidal purge. Once the Aryans fulfill these three revolutionary goals, the New Era begins, bringing

unimaginable peace and utopic existence. From these doctrines, it is clear that Pierce "legitimizes violence as a tool for implementing [his] program for change" (Whitsel, 1998:191).

Taken as a real blueprint for revolution, this three-fold attack had deadly consequences prior to McVeigh's bombing. The most significant consequence occurred in September 1983, when Robert Matthews founded The Order in Metaline Falls, Idaho. He created the movement with the specific intent of following the ideology and stages of revolutionary action laid out in *The Turner Diaries*, with the mandate of realizing the New Era.

Founding his group on the fictional principles depicted in *The Turner Diaries*, Matthews soon found that his fledgling movement needed money to achieve the organizations' perceived goals. He needed to buy the "arms to begin the campaign of guerrilla actions that would, in his view, eventually stimulate a mass uprising of the white population" (Barkun, 1994:228). The first step, then, was filling the organization's coffers. Beginning with smaller armed robberies and counterfeiting operations, The Order's expenses soared after buying weapons and training potential guerrilla soldiers. Soon, their crime spree culminated in the armed robbery of a Brinks armored car in Ukiah,

California, containing $3.8 million dollars. The Brinks heist would make it possible to continue their revolutionary work, but it also made them an FBI target. When the FBI tried to trace the stolen money, they had little luck, but surmised that a portion of it found its way to several white insurrectionist groups[44] (many with Christian Identity worldviews), to Pierce in "appreciation for his having written *The Turner Diaries*"[45] (Dees with Corcoran, 1996:145), and to The Order (which probably kept the rest of the money). The money funded its paramilitary sites (including 110 acres in Idaho and 160 acres in Missouri), supplied the group with weapons and ammunition, and provided The Order's leaders with an income (Ridgeway, 1990:95).

During their revolutionary activities, The Order planned and executed armed robberies, as well as attempted to assassinate Morris Dees, the founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Although Matthews originally targeted Dees, he later substituted Alan Berg, who was a Jewish radio talk-show host in Denver. The substitution was necessary because Matthews needed an immediate act of violence to instigate the insurrection and chaos that he desired. He

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[44] The FBI believed that since there was no direct increase in the robbers' accounts, the money likely went to sympathetic groups to further the cause.

[45] Pierce denies ever having received any of the money from the robbery.

had planned to torture Dees, which would have been time-consuming, whereas Berg was easy to track down and presented a figure whose death would attract national attention.

On June 18, 1984, "several Order leaders followed Berg home from work, waited for him to get out of his car, and then machine-gunned him to death" (Ridgeway, 1990:95). This was the most notorious of The Order's short-lived activities, because in December 8, 1984, the FBI and Matthews engaged in a shoot-out which led to Matthews' death. Once Matthews died, The Order lost its leader and its organizational coherence, with members being arrested, convicted, and jailed in 1985 and 1986 for their roles in The Order's activities.

Conclusion

While one can not forget the atrocities The Order committed and planned to commit against Jews, blacks, and other non-Aryans in the name of millenarian revolution, the 1995 image of the destroyed Murrah Building remains in the world's memory. As perhaps the most significant social consequence of *The Turner Diaries*, the Oklahoma City bombing sheds light on the impact extremist right-wing literature can have on society. Timothy McVeigh believed *The Turner Diaries* was his Bible, and, like other fundamentalist

right-wingers, took The Order's lead in attempting to realize his revolutionary Aryan ideal.

While the analysis of *The Turner Diaries* explored these millenarian Aryan visions, the next chapter explores McVeigh's attempt at continuing The Order's activities. Noting the immense influence *The Turner Diaries*, Christian Identity ideology, and anti-government beliefs had on McVeigh's actions, he is also the ultimate exemplification of an individual who crossed the threshold from fiction into reality.

Chapter Four: Timothy McVeigh

> Overturned trucks and automobiles, smashed office furniture, and building rubble were strewn wildly about--and so were the bodies of a shocking number of victims. Over everything hung the pall of black smoke, burning our eyes and lungs and reducing the bright morning to semi-darkness (Macdonald, 1980:40).

Taken from *The Turner Diaries*, this passage could have described the scene April 19, 1995, outside of the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City just as easily. The devastation caused by the domestically laid bomb was unprecedented in American history, killing 168 people and injuring hundreds of others.

In a haunting parallel between fiction and reality, a character in Macdonald's[46] novel continued to describe the scene after the bomb: "I heard a moan and looked down to see a girl...smudged and scraped, and she seemed only half conscious.... I [also] became aware for the first time of the moans and screams of other injured persons...covered with blood and [having] gaping wound[s]" (Macdonald, 1980:41). In an almost exact realization of the fictional scene described in *The Turner Diaries*, Timothy McVeigh reenacted the bombing with precision and determination, but

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[46] Throughout this chapter, I use William Pierce's pseudonym, Andrew Macdonald, in all references, though I occasionally interchange the names when referring to the man himself.

the reasons motivating him are as important as the methodical planning that would help him realize his goal.

Was McVeigh's reaction to the polarized environment he believe existed the sole motivation for bombing the Murrah Building, or were other factors influencing him? In previous chapters, a working theory illustrated the possible link between the perception of a threat and the violent responses elicited (Romans/Babylonians against Christians/elect in the Book of Revelation, BATF/FBI/ Babylonians against the Branch Davidians/elect, and the System/Babylonians against the Organization/Aryans/elect in *The Turner Diaries*). As such, it follows that McVeigh's perception of his social situation affected his worldview and apocalyptic visions. The goal of this chapter is to explore how McVeigh's environment, ideological worldview, and group affiliations affected his indirect application of the apocalyptic framework to his life. The combination of these diverse factors found expression in the destruction of the Murrah Building on April 19, 1995.

Personal History and Background

Timothy McVeigh had an average family life, living with his parents and two sisters in a quiet New York suburb. When he was a child, his parents had marriage difficulties, so he was left to spend time with his grandfather, who

taught him about guns by taking him from gun show to gun show. In the time the two spent together, they forged a close bond and as a result, Timothy developed an interest in weapons while distancing himself from the problems his parents were having at home.

Problems developed in the McVeighs' marriage because both partners wanted different things out of life. Timothy's father found spending time at home with his wife and three children to be fulfilling, but Timothy's mother preferred going out with girlfriends. To show her dissatisfaction with her marriage, Mickey McVeigh often had indiscreet extra-marital affairs. The couple's differences and attitudes towards their marriage soon drove them apart: they divorced when Timothy was ten, despite being fairly devout Catholics. After his parents split up, Timothy stayed with his father, graduated from High school and got work with an armored car company, Burke Armor, Inc. After briefly working for them, McVeigh joined the Army and became a dedicated soldier, aiming to distinguish himself in the service.

His military career held great promise and he received several commendations and awards[47] for his efforts, but also

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[47] McVeigh quickly became a sergeant, "had received the Bronze Star, the Army Achievement Medal [twice], the Southwest Asia Service Medal, and the Kuwait Liberation Medal" (Stickney, 1996:115).

numerous reprimands for the racist comments he made against blacks. Army discipline was insufficient in moderating his open hatred for blacks, and his racist attitudes grew as he continued to serve. It was when enlisted in the army that McVeigh began reading anti-semitic literature, Christian Identity pamphlets, and the writings of Adolf Hitler.[48] A former girlfriend of McVeigh said: "'From what I remember, [Timothy] said he didn't necessarily agree with all those Jews being killed...[b]ut he said Hitler had the right plan. I think he was talking about when Hitler tried to conquer the world, how he went about it, little pieces at a time'" (qtd. in Dees with Corcoran, 1996:154). Although not a devoted member of the American Nazi Party, McVeigh did lean towards Neo-Nazi ideologies, typified and reflected in *The Turner Diaries*.

For McVeigh, the reconciliation between Neo-Nazi ideology and Christian theology was possible because he saw several commonalities between the two worldviews. If a conflict in interpretation occurred, he simply reinterpreted ideological elements to fit his new cosmology. For instance, having been raised a Roman Catholic, McVeigh was

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[48] McVeigh did not espouse Nazism wholeheartedly, but chose the elements that fit into his revolutionary, anti-governmental, supremacist worldview. Most predominantly, he embraced the apocalyptic New Order, which is a theme that echoes the New Era in *The Turner Diaries*.

already familiar with the creation story of Genesis, with Jesus Christ, and the apocalyptic visions of the Second Coming. McVeigh incorporated these religious elements into his cosmology, but manipulated them to merge with the Christian Identity doctrines he initially embraced when he was in the army.

Maintaining that the Bible still contained the inspired word of God, McVeigh chose to believe Christian Identity's interpretation of creation, Jesus Christ's role as a martyr in the Aryan's fight for their rightful future, and the realization of the New Era as the true apocalypse. For McVeigh, Christian Identity described the true Aryan historical lineage (based on the Second Seed Theory), and explained the differences (and alleged superiority) of the Aryan race over all others. In Christian Identity, rather than the Jews being the Israelites, the Chosen race of God, the Aryans fulfill the role. By identifying the Aryans rather than the Jews as the elect people, Christian Identity (and subsequently McVeigh) maintains the legitimacy and coherence of the rest of the Bible. Like all other fundamentalist Christian groups, the Bible is true only according to their own interpretation.

The influence that Neo-Nazi ideologies had on McVeigh appeared in his belief that all non-Aryans were to be

conquered by the Aryan race. He embraced the most general premises of Nazism, while meshing them with elements he found familiar and useful in Christianity. Apocalypticism, for instance, was a foundational element in his worldview. Although secularized by McVeigh, the apocalyptic ideal presupposed that something better lay in the future. This belief gave him strength because, as a participant in realizing the New Era, he "[wa]s encouraged to act, to either change the world or to endure it a short time longer. The power of [this belief is that] every person who heeds its call to action [becomes] the object of blessing" (Thatcher, 1998:567). The appeal of combining his Aryan ideals with elements of the apocalyptic framework was undeniable. Without having to forsake either his Christian upbringing or his Nazi beliefs, McVeigh blended the totality of race elimination that the Neo-Nazis envisioned with the complete worldly transformation that the New Era/apocalypse foretold. To McVeigh, both ideologies addressed the same issue--Aryan dominance--so there was no need to disregard either Christian Identity or Nazism. They co-existed in his cosmology, and together solidified his place in the world.

McVeigh's perspective then, was that the two seemingly disparate ideologies were not exclusive sets of beliefs, but were compatible. The common theme of racial superiority--of

being the Chosen people fighting for their rightful place in society--runs through these two groups' framework, and each group's leaders formally acknowledge the other's claim. The groups "view themselves as allies, [and] racial soldiers fighting a common foe" (Stanton, 1991:82). McVeigh tapped into this pseudo-religious hate brotherhood, and focused his attention on the Jewish people, the common foe who supposedly controlled the government and represented the Antichrist.

This extremist aspect of McVeigh's cosmology developed soon after his Gulf War experiences and his failure to gain a position in the elite Green Berets. McVeigh accepted a training position with the Berets, but for unknown reasons chose an honorable discharge to once again become a civilian. He returned to familiar work, getting sporadic shifts of guard duty with Burns International Security. His continuing disillusionment with the government, however, increased after ending his military career and not receiving steady employment at his security job.[49] During this crucial period of disenchantment with the government,

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[49] While he worked at Burns, he filed claims to "receive compensation for [rashes he claimed he got from the] Gulf War...[b]ut his request for compensation was eventually turned down, for unknown reasons" (Stickney, 1996:135). The rejection of his compensation claim combined with a lack of regular employment and his already developed anti-government attitudes likely contributed to triggering greater feelings of paranoia and persecution.

McVeigh joined the ranks of right-wing militia and Patriotic movements. Finding others with similar anti-government feelings and embracing the message in *The Turner Diaries*, McVeigh began traveling across the U.S. to various gun shows, selling his 'bible' (*The Turner Diaries*) and hoping to fraternize more with other like-minded individuals.

At gun shows, in an effort to share his unique set of beliefs with others, McVeigh sold *The Turner Diaries* at a loss. The novel was "'supposed to be $10, but he'd sell them for $5. It was like he was looking for converts'" (qtd. in Dees with Corcoran, 1996:158). The more gun shows he attended, the stronger his commitment to his extremist worldview became. He was also more willing to voice his extreme beliefs, so when the Waco disaster occurred, it was as if all his beliefs about an oppressive U.S. government received validation, causing his polarized feelings to solidify. McVeigh felt he needed to address the current American political situation, believing it was too authoritarian and abusive, which stemmed directly from the combination of the Waco conflict with his complex personal cosmology.

Revolutionary Attitudes Towards the United States Government

For McVeigh, the apocalyptic framework provided an outlet for his anti-government beliefs. The assault he

planned on the Murrah Building had its foundations in making his revolutionary desires known to the world. To this end, he sought to send a message to the United States Government saying that they could no longer control what he saw as the inevitable beginning of the New Era. Concerned with the direction the U.S. Government was taking, McVeigh wrote a letter to the *Union-Sun & Journal* in New York, declaring that:

> Politicians are out of control....Who is to blame for the mess? At a point when the world has seen communism falter as an imperfect system to manage people, democracy seems to be headed down the same road. No one is seeing the "big" picture.... What is it going to take to open up the eyes of our elected officials? AMERICA IS IN SERIOUS DECLINE.... Is a civil war imminent? Do we have to shed blood to reform the current system? I hope it doesn't come to that! But it might (qtd. in Dees with Corcoran, 1996:156-157).

McVeigh's alienation and low opinion of the U.S. Government's apparent corruption and waywardness foreshadowed his future plan of action. To reform the current political system, McVeigh felt that bombing a federal building would draw attention to his claims and achieve his revolutionary goal by ending the present system, and replacing it with another.

The first step in initiating the revolutionary process is to declare war with the government and shed the blood of the guilty (those who followed the system, which might be interpreted as a secular Babylon). In doing so, McVeigh

believed that he could unify all those in opposition to the current system, calling them to action. By proclaiming the beginning of the New Era on the cusp of realization, McVeigh thought that his direct actions against the government would set into motion an uprising of unparalleled proportions. Everyone taking part in this uprising would believe that the government no longer represented the white American, finally realizing that the Jews had an unrelenting hold over the Aryan people. Revolution was now the only option left to the righteous Aryan. This belief echoes the apocalyptic framework that not only provides a release for the reader's potentially volatile beliefs, but also "provide[s] a powerful motivation for socio-political action on the part of the faithful" (Thatcher, 1998:556). McVeigh's calling the supposedly righteous Aryans to revolutionary action is a hallmark example of the power of apocalyptic rhetoric's applicability to personal beliefs and interpretation.

Also motivating McVeigh's actions was his continuing belief that the current government acted in a conspiratorial manner and against the interests of the average citizen. To McVeigh, the BATF and FBI's involvement in the Ruby Ridge[50]

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[50] The Ruby Ridge conflict is one that influenced McVeigh's opinion concerning the government's oppressiveness, and parallels the Branch Davidian situation in many respects. The conflict had an undertone of right-wing militia ideology running through it, and research completed in the conflict's aftermath indicates that the Weavers thought that the U.S. Government was actually the

and Branch Davidian conflicts were prime examples of the government's oppressive tendencies. In confronting the Weavers and the Davidians, McVeigh believed that the government was disarming citizens who had both potentially threatening anti-government beliefs and weapons that could be used in opposition to the federal government.

Although the extreme nature of these beliefs seems foreign to most people, the anti-government and revolutionary movements that McVeigh loosely belonged to shared many similar convictions with one another, often times creating tension with the surrounding government agencies. With a potential audience of hundreds of thousands,[51] the right-wing militia organizations that espouse these ideologies can reach interested parties through a network of rallies, pamphlets, meetings, and group literature. *The Turner Diaries*, which depicts a broad range of extremist viewpoints, is a well-circulated novel

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Zionist Occupation Government. The Weaver family engaged the FBI in a standoff, partly due to their Christian Identity beliefs, and partly because Randy Weaver "was a federal fugitive, wanted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms on a weapons charge for selling sawed-off shotguns" (Bock, 1995:5). For a detailed discussion see Bock, 1995.

[51] The associations and inter-connections between militia groups, separatist groups, and other hate groups are numerous, but there is no accurate statistic to gauge the actual member numbers, or the transient involvement in these movements.

attractive to many readers who share a common conspiratorial set of beliefs. When one reads the back cover of the novel, the militia ideology is clear:

> What will you do when they come to take your guns? Earl Turner and his fellow patriots face this question and are forced underground when the U.S. government bans the private possession of firearms and stages mass Gun Raids to round up suspected gun owners.... The FBI has labeled *The Turner Diaries* "the bible of the racist right." If the government had the power to ban books, this one would be at the top of its list (Macdonald, 1980).

McVeigh believed that this fictional description fitted the current political situation, and he reacted violently to the perceived threat. Focusing his attention on what he thought symbolized the threat best--"Robert Ricks, the lead spokesman for the BATF at the Waco, Texas confrontation with David Koresh and the Branch Davidians" (Stickney, 1996:31)--McVeigh targeted Ricks and the rest of the branch offices of the BATF in the Murrah Building with the intention of halting the government's plan to disarm the people. McVeigh carried his desire for a worldly governmental change beyond the initial step of imagination, and began to create the means through which he would accomplish his goal.

Further symbolizing the government's corruption, the Murrah Building once contained the offices of some FBI officials, who had moved location prior to the bombing, unbeknownst to McVeigh. McVeigh held the FBI largely

responsible for the Waco tragedy and strongly believed in the "Unorganized Militia's"[52] propaganda claiming:

> ...the result [of the siege] was intended: The government wanted to attack ordinary citizens as part of a larger plan.... [T]he government tank that sprayed gas into a Branch Davidian building spewed flames instead, intentionally starting the fire that engulfed the compound.... Everything that happened was part of a battle of good versus evil, evil embodied in the United States government (Stern, 1996:62-63).

The building was an obvious target to focus McVeigh's polarized and violent intent, since he thought that the offices of those government agencies were both symbolically and literally to blame for the deterioration of the American way. In essence, the Waco tragedy solidified McVeigh and the militia's beliefs in the Iron Heel's[53] goal while providing a symbol of the government upon which the militia movements could focus, criticize, and attack.

Tom Metzger, founder of the White Aryan Resistance, praised McVeigh's retaliatory actions:

> It would seem to your humble Editor [Metzger] that the Murrah Federal Building was the largest symbol of the Iron Heel in the Heartland Region outside a city like Chicago. All the offices of the most hated agencies were in the building. Nearly everyone in the building has devoted their lives

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[52] The "Unorganized Militia" is the name of a movement led by Indianapolis attorney Linda Thompson, whose aim is to distribute conspiracy literature, "propaganda on Waco, [the] government, and the New World Order" (Stern, 1996:61), pulling together disparate militia, Christian Identity, and right-wing groups under a common umbrella of hate.

[53] The Iron Heel is another name commonly used to describe the U.S. Government in right-wing fundamentalist movements.

> to the service of the Iron Heel. Did not Middle America need a firm wake up call?... The innocent are far from innocent, since their negligence will usually require a McVeigh to get the discussion [of freedom] off square one...Timothy McVeigh has gone farther than any Aryan thus far in Striking back at The Beast. **Hail Timothy McVeigh!** [all capitalization and emphasis are author's] (Metzger, 1997:2).

In both Christian Identity and white supremacist militia circles, McVeigh's actions receive monumental approval and illustrate the extremism of such groups.

April 19

The Waco confrontation did much to influence and sharpen McVeigh's anti-government convictions, compelling him to plan an attack. Allegedly, he made two pilgrimages to the Mount Carmel compound to see the damage done, protesting the BATF and FBI's claims of innocence along the way. In planning his attack, he chose the time (which was the anniversary of the Waco disaster) and the location (the Murrah Building) for the specific purpose of disputing the government's claim of innocence (Stickney, 1996:154-155) in a forum where the world would hear--through the media.

While the Waco confrontation was McVeigh's foremost instigating reason to bomb the Murrah Building, April 19 recalled other poignant events that contributed to his decision.[54] First, April 19, 1985, was the date of the

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[54] In *No More Wacos,* Kopel and Blackman take the significance of April 19 in McVeigh's decision process to extreme levels, suggesting the date is "a strange conjunction of anniversaries of armed peoples and armed

FBI's raid on the "paramilitary wing of the Christian Identity" (Dees with Corcoran, 1996:18) named the Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord (CSA for short). The organization, whose purpose was to prepare for any social or political confrontation that threatened their movement, heavily armed themselves--an undertaking that led to a raid by the FBI. Charging them with multiple weapons violations, the FBI found that the "Christian rightists had stockpiled weapons and poisonous gas, and had an association with another group, The Order."[55] (Stickney, 1996:25) As an organization known for its extremist ideologies and radical criminal operations, the CSA was the focus of FBI surveillance, especially after The Order's demise. Because the FBI thought that there was a possibility that the CSA

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government" (Kopel and Blackman, 1997:192). These anniversaries include: Paul Revere's 1775 ride which began the American Revolution; Elliot Ness's birthday; and, it was the anniversary of the Nazi assault on the Warsaw ghetto in 1943. In an even more far-reaching supposition, Kopel and Blackman suggest that April 19 was the approximate anniversary of the battle of Masada, that they claim occurred in 66 C.E. (Kopel and Blackman, 1997:192-193). This date, however, is highly contested, which makes the April 19 date a remote possibility.

While these events are a curious combination of coincidences, it is doubtful that they had any impact on McVeigh's choice of April 19. It is of greater probability that the events occurring in the last decade mentioned further along in this chapter would influence his behavior in a more direct and significant way.

[55] The Order was defunct at this time, although their legacy continued to affect numerous militia movements.

planned on continuing The Order's revolutionary schemes, they investigated the stockpile of weapons.

Years later, however, the FBI's surveillance of The Order and the CSA drew McVeigh's attention, who believed that a pattern existed in the government's intervention. Each time an organization had opposing views to the current political force, the FBI would investigate and disarm it. The Branch Davidian conflict was the most prominent example of the pattern, but a list of other incidents (including The Order and the CSA confrontations) would show how the FBI used military tactics to eliminate possible threats to the establishment.

The perceived governmental threat exemplified in the FBI's raid of The Order and the CSA, however, would ripple throughout subsequent militia movements' attitudes towards the government. The series of confrontations began a chain of anti-government activities occurring on April 19, in memorial to these two groups' conflicts. To capture the growing militia's fascination and support for these armed encounters, April 19 became the date that the "Montana Militia...proclaimed 'National Militia Day'" (Stickney, 1996:25). McVeigh's knowledge of this 'national holiday' furthered his resolve to act on April 19, adding another facet to his complex belief system.[56]

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[56] To further contribute to McVeigh's awareness of the

The symbolism of April 19 goes beyond the CSA and The Order's confrontation with the FBI. A further surreptitious connection exists through Richard Snell, a man who claimed membership in both organizations. The significance of his dual membership (besides the obvious revolutionary anti-government ideology running through the groups) is in Snell's indirect involvement in McVeigh's bombing plans. Although it seems initially a tenuous connection, upon closer examination a distinct link and influence appears between Snell and McVeigh. In tracing the connection, however, one encounters references to another para-military organization, named Elohim City.

Elohim City, a 240-acre compound northeast of Oklahoma, is an ultra right-wing organization believing in Christian Identity. During McVeigh's trial, prosecutors introduced evidence that McVeigh visited the supremacist compound on several occasions, and allegedly called there two weeks before the bombing (Witkin, 1997:28). This meeting might seem inconsequential, but the coincidence of McVeigh's association with an organization that had a member (Richard Snell) who planned to bomb the Murrah Building in 1983 is too unlikely to be a mere coincidence.

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significance of April 19 in militia history (excluding the actual bombing itself), the false driver's license he used to rent the Ryder truck that transported the bomb had April 19, 1972, as his birthday.

To many militia groups, Richard Snell was a heroic figure who embodied all of the concerns of the anti-government movements, the Christian Identity movement (and indirectly most supremacist movements), and the importance of April 19. To McVeigh, he was also the catalyst that compelled him to carry out his revolutionary goal of bombing the Murrah Building. Snell had targeted the Murrah Building for reasons similar to McVeigh's (Phillips, 1997:36), but was apprehended and convicted of murdering a black police officer before he could carry out his plan. Snell's punishment was the death penalty, ironically scheduled to be carried out on April 19, 1995, a date that was already synonymous with militia actions. As a tribute to Snell, the Davidians, and all the militia organizations, McVeigh[57] detonated the bomb in the Murrah Building hours before Snell's execution. Allegedly, Snell smiled and chuckled when he saw the news reports on the television. His callous reaction to the bombing is a likely indication of Snell's realization that a sympathetic follower finally realized the plan he conceived of twelve years earlier. With the knowledge that the revolution against the

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[57] The courts convicted McVeigh and Terry Nichols of the bombing, but Nichols' impact on McVeigh's polarized motivations is negligible. Nichols acted on his own set of beliefs, which requires a separate analysis beyond the scope of this examination.

government would continue even after his death, Snell expressed his pleasure at being a martyr.

Parallels Between the Oklahoma Bombing and *The Turner Diaries*

The reality of *The Turner Diaries* being McVeigh's blueprint for the Murrah bombing is obvious upon reading the novel. Far too many parallels exist to be overlooked and summarily dismissed, despite Pierce's claims "'...the only similarity [between the novel and the bombing] is that a truck bomb was used in both cases.... The motive for the bombing of FBI headquarters [in the novel] is spelled out: It wasn't to wake anybody up or send a message but was to destroy a bank of computers'" (Richardson, 1997:A1). Despite Pierce's disavowal regarding the influence *The Turner Diaries* on McVeigh's actions, the effect of the novel on McVeigh is clear. The inspiration and perhaps even the framework of McVeigh's worldview correlates directly with the ideas expressed within the novel. While the exact purpose for and details of the fictional bombing are occasionally inconsistent with those of the Oklahoma bombing, the underlying motivations remain the same--to destroy the symbol of ZOG (or more simply put, the government).

Believing that the government was instrumental in making the average citizen completely harmless and unthreatening, McVeigh lashed out and struck a blow against his perceived oppressors. Unlike the ignorant majority of the population controlled by the Jews, McVeigh made the attempt to change his situation and that of other supposedly deserving Aryans for the better, believing that his vision of the New Era was representative of all the Chosen Ones. To justify his actions and the ensuing destruction, McVeigh recalled what his fictional counterpart claimed:

> ...there is no way [to] destroy the System without hurting many thousands of innocent people--no way. It is a cancer too deeply rooted in our flesh. And if we don't destroy the System before it destroys us--if we don't cut this cancer out of our living flesh--our whole race will die" (Macdonald, 1980:42).

McVeigh and Turner were aware that their actions would result in a high death toll, but they believed that they were fighting for Aryan survival, which was of far greater value for them than the lives of a few complacent and undeserving individuals. Not only did McVeigh and his fictional counterpart believe that fighting for Aryan rights against an almost undefeatable government was a great purpose, but also the fighting itself ensured a certain purity and unity in the world after the New Era begins. Only those individuals willing to fight--and die--for their cause could secure a place in the utopic Aryan world.

In trying to realize the New Era in Oklahoma City, the destruction left by the effort was appalling. The bomb detonated in the Murrah Building "left a crater eight feet deep and 30 feet long" (Barnaby, 1996:102). It consisted of a simple combination of 900 kg (or almost 2000 lbs) of ammonium nitrate mixed with racing fuel, placed in the back of a rented Ryder truck. In *The Turner Diaries*, the bomb was "a little under 5,000 pounds...of ammonium nitrate fertilizer" (Macdonald, 1980:35), which Turner planted in a "delivery truck belonging to an office-supply firm" (Macdonald, 1980:38). At 9:15 am, once the fertilizer and fuel mixture was ready, Earl Turner drove the truck through the "freight door to the basement level" (Macdonald, 1980:39), parked the vehicle, and walked calmly away to the getaway car as the "pavement shuddered violently under [his] feet" (Macdonald, 1980:39). McVeigh executed his plan in a similar fashion, parking the rented Ryder truck outside the front of the Murrah Building during regular business and day-care hours, walking away, and triggering the bomb at 9:02 AM.

Similarities even existed in where the bomber placed the charge in the respective buildings. Both bombs were designed to collapse the structure inwards, not only destroying as much as possible, but also making the

structure itself "uninhabital [sic] for an extended period" (Macdonald, 1980:37). Planting the bomb in an area in the sub-structure, or as near to it as possible, guaranteed a certain amount of success in achieving significant destruction. From the pictures taken in Oklahoma City, the goal of immense damage and loss of life was fulfilled dramatically, and the Murrah Building was never again habitable. It was a stark, partially standing memorial until it was torn down later in 1995, leaving only the razed, fenced-off site as a memorial for survivors and families to visit.

The commonalties between McVeigh's bomb and Turner's bomb cannot be denied, which include the common target of the bombing. In *The Turner Diaries*, the bomb targeted the "FBI's national headquarters" (Macdonald, 1980:38) to end a government passport program,[58] whereas McVeigh planned his bomb specifically to kill BATF head Robert Ricks[59] and other representative government officials. The commonality is

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[58] The program tracked the activities of all its citizens with a system that required everyone to carry a passport with them at all times. The police would then have the ability to stop anyone in the street and check the passport and the whereabouts of the individual, incarcerating individuals who do not adhere to the plan.

[59] McVeigh was unsuccessful in killing Ricks, since he moved offices after his transfer to the Transportation department. This move was a direct result of his involvement in the Waco incident which proved embarrassing to Reno and Clinton.

that McVeigh's and Turner's targets supposedly had used their corrupt power against the Aryan people, thereby (in the eyes of the militia) making themselves pawns in the System that needed to be destroyed.

Conclusion

As a final comparative note between Earl Turner and Timothy McVeigh, a major difference between *The Turner Diaries* and McVeigh's situation should be noted. While Turner's actions marked the beginning of the New Order's complete manifestation, McVeigh's actions have not sparked such an obvious worldly revolution. However McVeigh envisioned his actions panning out in his Aryan, anti-governmental worldview, the New Era has not yet begun, despite the growing number of militia movements. Though not sparking the worldwide revolution he so desired, McVeigh has become a martyr in supremacist circles, with such groups as WAR, the National Alliance, and Christian Identity touting the reputed dedication and courage of such a brave Aryan soldier. Perhaps McVeigh simply was the most recently publicized 'idealized Aryan soldier' who followed the path laid out for him by The Order, the CSA, and Richard Snell, and he, in turn, will be followed by others. If these individuals remain angered by a world that seems to be marginalizing them, then others will develop McVeigh's

ideological visions, and also attempt to give rise to the New Era.

Conclusion

Throughout the numerous examples of the apocalyptic framework's use in history and tendency to recur in times of crisis, one thing remains unchanged--the framework's capacity to capture the imaginations of groups or individuals who are looking to order their world by predicting what is to come in the next. As the third millennium approaches, little doubt exists that others will continue to apply the apocalyptic framework to their situations, simply because an infinite number of imaginary possibilities are available. As a reflection of the reader's own belief system and the means through which some people translate their worldly experiences, apocalypticism is a powerful and dynamic element in social, political, and religious arenas. The possibility exists that there is a human tendency towards apocalyptic thinking that spans cultures, eras, and many religions, but this is a theory that goes beyond the scope of this thesis and on which one could focus further research.

Despite the framework's appearance in all areas of social concern, the apocalyptic framework continues to be downplayed, if not completely ignored, by most of society. This lack of attention has proven dangerous since, time and again, some groups and individuals show that the apocalyptic

framework is fundamental in capturing and shaping unique worldviews. Its application to life is not an isolated phenomenon. The Randy Weaver (Ruby Ridge) and Freemen incidents are simply two recent examples of anti-governmental, religiously motivated events to which my thesis may have applicability, but these incidents lack sufficient textual sources to support an extended analysis. The area of anti-American separatist movements may indicate where future study and research could further knowledge about the contemporary uses of the apocalyptic framework.

The four dynamic characteristics that form the basis of the apocalyptic structure are inherently flexible and can accommodate a variety of interpretations and applications. As a result of this flexibility, groups and individuals use the apocalyptic paradigm as a means to release feelings of persecution in difficult and crisis-filled situations. Most often, groups view their challenging situation as one similar to that found in such texts as the Book of Revelation, and act as though the events were analogous. The symbols that these groups use are deliberately mystifying to allow for multiple (or analogous) interpretations, and without boundaries limiting the possible interpretations.

Moreover, the ambiguity hinders the creation of boundaries that might limit possible interpretations. Groups continue to utilize such apocalyptic texts because the underlying message is positive--future perfection exists just beyond the present turmoil. If the battle is just then a state of utopia awaits the believers when the righteous rule and the wicked are no longer a threat. In this realized kingdom, the forces of good will triumph over those of evil, and this belief validates the cost of the struggle itself. Despite the losses suffered, if one can prove oneself as part of The Chosen, then the rewards outweigh the sacrifices.

John the Apostle was not the first writer to describe the polarized worldview that this study discusses, but in Western society his work is one of the most influential. The Book of Revelation emerged out of a long history of conflict between Jewish and Hellenistic cultures, and was meant to guide his audience as they awaited the Kingdom of God in the face of Roman persecution. John, however, also included other meanings in Revelation by drawing on the familiar Jewish apocalyptic characteristics so that he could write messages of exhortation, encouragement, and criticism to his readers. By layering the messages, John hoped to unite the early Christians against the Roman Empire in order

to bring about the end of Christian persecution. Unity provided strength against a common foe, and John masterfully exhorted and consoled his audience to react to the extreme environmental pressures.

The Branch Davidians, through their interpretation of the Book of Revelation, also relied on the apocalyptic framework. In doing so, they created a community whose central motivating ideology was the return of the messiah and the subsequent battle of Armageddon. Armed with this ideology, it should not have been a surprise to anyone that the Davidians were prepared to repel any force, real or perceived, that they felt threatened the integrity of their worldview. David Koresh believed that his community were engaged in the final battle between the forces of the Chosen Ones and the disbelievers. The U.S. government's refusal to acknowledge the importance of the Davidians' worldview in their subsequent actions led to the disastrous outcome of April 19, 1993.

Moreover, the BATF and FBI further complicated the already volatile situation by assuming that allegations of physical and sexual abuse were true, ongoing, and unlikely to stop unless outside force was used. The approval of the CS gas plan relied heavily on this assumption and proved to be the catalyst for the final conflict. With hindsight,

mistakes on both sides during the conflict are easily identifiable, but one thing should have been apparent to all involved at the time--the Davidians had a clear worldview through which they perceived their surroundings. Had the FBI realized how their actions were feeding the Davidians' apocalyptic beliefs, then the conflict might have been resolved with the deaths of fewer individuals.

Chapter Three also discusses a dramatic apocalyptic struggle, this time in the form of a textual and sociological analysis of the white supremacist novel *The Turner Diaries*. Macdonald's novel deals with a secularized version of the apocalypse found in the Book of Revelation. It relies on specific characteristics that distinguish the genre from other prophetic writings, and it uses the framework to further Neo-Nazi rather than Christian ideology. Couched within the fictionalized depiction of the Aryan apocalypse, potential exists for violence enacted in reality by those who espouse the characters' beliefs. The danger of fiction becoming reality does exist and the formation of The Order in 1983 is a testament to what might occur again.

The Order, whose main objective was to realize the new Aryan Era through violence against non-Aryans, was a supremacist guerrilla movement based on *The Turner Diaries*.

Promoting Neo-Nazi ideologies, militia tactics, and genocide, many suffered at the hands of the group's violent robberies, counterfeiting operations, and racially motivated assassinations. Although a relatively small organization, The Order's presence subsists in the plans of others who emulate their actions and ideology more than a decade after the group's demise.

As a racist, anti-governmental movement that received media attention, The Order provided a glimpse into the right-wing militia underground and the far reaching connections that exist with other supremacist movements and hate groups. This intricate web of hate was epitomized in the actions of Timothy McVeigh, who has become a 'martyr' for 'the Aryan cause'. With the bombing of the Murrah Building, McVeigh created a focal point for all politically and racially motivated hate groups. By taking the message found in *The Turner Diaries* a step beyond The Order's activities, McVeigh made a statement that resounds indefinitely in the public's collective memory.

McVeigh's bombing was the most recent and deadly use of the apocalyptic framework in the contemporary period. Although seemingly unrelated to the characteristics found in the Book of Revelation, McVeigh's attempt to herald the Aryan apocalypse had a dual purpose. First, by using the

apocalyptic paradigm found in *The Turner Diaries*, McVeigh's bombing supposedly began the period of tribulation that would ultimately lead to the realized utopia. By choosing to bomb a federal building that would result in millions hearing of the event, McVeigh believed he could also signal the period of tribulation to others sympathetic to his own ideology.

Second, McVeigh wanted to address what he believed was the government's blatant infringement of the Branch Davidians' right to hold differing views than the government (or what he called the Iron Heel). The two goals intersected with the Murrah Building's destruction on April 19, 1995. Admittedly, it is doubtful that McVeigh consciously reacted to the Davidians' commonly shared apocalyptic beliefs, but rather responded to the Davidians' conflict with the government. That McVeigh and the Davidians both believed in an apocalyptic future is perhaps just an intriguing coincidence, but it has forever linked McVeigh's actions with the Davidians' conflict and subsequently the apocalyptic framework popularized by the Book of Revelation.

In spite of McVeigh's failure to realize the apocalyptic future that he desired, he did bring a taste of the militia's war mentality to the world's attention. By

advertently illuminating America's growing militia movements, McVeigh's actions showed how the extreme right-wing's interests are becoming an influential factor in both political and social arenas. Politically, McVeigh captures the volatile response that militia (and racist) ideologies breed if government agencies continue to marginalize their concerns. Socially, McVeigh's actions have galvanized many right-wing movements by providing a supposed martyr for their cause. Since the bombing, he has been perceived as a true soldier willing to fight for Aryan rights against what many groups see as an oppressive system, and as a result, he has become an inspiration to other like-minded individuals.

In *The Turner Diaries*, Earl Turner declared: "Today it finally began! After all these years of talking--and nothing but talking--we have finally taken our first action. We are at war with the System, and it is no longer a war of words" (Macdonald, 1980:1). On April 19, 1995, McVeigh tried to start a war--a war that relied indirectly upon an apocalyptic framework. Whether McVeigh's actions will eventually herald the beginning of a New Era remains to be seen, but certainly his impact will be felt for years to come.

So with the knowledge gained from past uses of the apocalyptic framework we look toward the approaching third millennium and prepare for future claims of impending doom or imminent salvation. Certainly, humanity will continue to conjure up images of what lies ahead, proselytizing and envisioning both hopeful and hopeless visions of the future. By applying the structured characteristics of the apocalyptic framework to new ideologies and movements in the next millennium, perhaps some misunderstanding can be avoided and society can avert such tragedies as the Waco conflict and the Oklahoma City Bombing.

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Appendix A

See Pocket.

Historical Roots of the Branch Davidian Movement

Compiled by Rick Branch

Fragmentation in religious extremist groups seems to be a common characteristic. From William Miller's prediction of Jesus' Second Coming in 1843-44, have come several well known and rapidly growing organizations. This chart represents the Jehovah's Witness groups, the Adventist groups and the Sacred Name groups. Some of the key figures in these various movements were (from left to right) Charles Taze Russell, Ellen G. White, Herbert W. Armstrong and David Koresh.

Photo courtesy: Russell - Library of Congress, White - Billy Graham Center, Armstrong - Worldwide Church of God, Koresh - Waco Tribune-Herald.

William Miller

Predicted Christ's Second Coming between 3/21/1843 - 3/21/1844. Revised date to 10/22/1844.

Hiram Edson

Said 1844 date was correct. Jesus to begin "Investigative Judgment," not return to earth.

Ellen G. White

Early leader in the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Taught soul sleep and annihilation of the dead. Must keep Jewish dietary laws. Saturday worship (Sabbatarian). Rejected doctrine of burning hell.

Victor Houteff

First called The Shepherd's Rod, name later changed to Davidian Seventh Day Adventist. Expected Christ's return in his life. Wanted to move headquarters to Israel.

Florence Houteff

Victor's wife became leader of the DSDA after his death. She also predicted the Lord's return on 4/22/1959.

Benjamin Roden

Returned to DSDA on 4/22/1959. Claimed to be a sign from God. Founded the Branch Davidians.

Vernon Howell a.k.a. David Koresh

Took control of the Branch Davidians after gun battle with Roden in 1987. Has claimed to be the Lamb of Revelation.

Nelson Barbour

Though never part of the Millerite system, he used Miller's dating system to predict Jesus' second presence in 1874 and the world's end in 1914.

Charles Taze Russell

Founded the International Bible Students. Said Jesus Second Coming and Armegeddon would be in 1914.

Joseph Rutherford

Changed International Bible Student's name to Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Predicted Abraham's return in 1925.

Paul S. L. Johnson

Founded the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement.

John J. Hoefle

Founded the Epiphany Bible Students Association.

R.H. Hirsh
I.F. Hoskins

Founded the Pastoral Bible Institute.

W.N. Woodworth

Founded the Dawn Bible students.

John W. Krewson

Founded the Laodicean Home Missionary Movement.

B.F. Snook
W.H. Brinkhoff

Founded the Church of God (Adventist) Sabbatarian.

Andrew N. Duggar

Founded the Church of God (Seventh-day) Taught Jewish festivals. Sabbatarianism. Anglo-Israelism. Rejected the Trinity. Considered moving headquarters to Israel.

Herbert W. Armstrong

Founded the Worldwide Church of God. Rejects the Trinity, teaches Anglo-Israelism, Jewish feasts and Sabbatarianism.

Garner Ted Armstrong

Founded International Church of God. Sabbatarian and Jewish feasts. Rejects the Trinity.

Gerold Ray Flurry

Founded the Philadelphia Church of God. Sabbatarian. Jewish feasts and festivals. Rejects the Trinity.

C.O. Dobb

Founded the Faith Bible and Tract Society. Rejects the Trinity. Teaches Sabbatarianism and the necessity of knowing the sacred name.

Joseph Owsinski

Assembles of Yahweh. Sacred name, Old Testament feasts.

L.S. Snow

Assemblies of Yahweh. Jewish festivals and food. Sabbatarian. Sacred name.

Jacob O. Myers

Assemblies of Yahweh. Sabbatarian. Sacred name, Old Testament interprets the New Testament.